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# WORK:

## A STORY OF EXPERIENCE.

By LOUISA M. ALCOTT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN," "AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL,"
"LITTLE MEN," "HOSPITAL SKETCHES," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# WORK;

## OR, CHRISTIE'S EXPERIMENT.

### CHAPTER I.

#### BEGINNING AGAIN.

IT was an April day when Christie went to her new home. Warm rains had melted the last trace of snow, and every bank was full of pricking grass-blades, brave little pioneers and heralds of the spring. The budding elm boughs swung in the wind; blue-jays screamed among the apple-trees; and robins chirped shrilly, as if rejoicing over winter hardships safely passed. Vernal freshness was in the air despite its chill, and lovely hints of summer time were everywhere.

These welcome sights and sounds met Christie, as she walked down the lane, and,

coming to a gate, paused there to look about her. An old-fashioned cottage stood in the midst of a garden just awakening from its winter sleep. One elm hung protectingly over the low roof, sunshine lay warmly on it, and at every window flowers' bright faces smiled at the passer-by invitingly.

On one side glittered a long green-house, and on the other stood a barn, with a sleek cow ruminating in the yard, and an inquiring horse poking his head out of his stall to view the world. Many comfortable grey hens were clucking and scratching about the hay-strewn floor, and a flock of doves sat cooing on the roof.

A quiet, friendly place it looked, for nothing marred its peace; and the hopeful, healthful spirit of the season seemed to haunt the spot. Snow-drops and crocuses were up in one secluded nook; a plump Maltese cat sat purring in the porch; and a dignified old dog came marching down the walk to escort the stranger in. With a brightening face Christie went up the path, and tapped at the quaint knocker, hoping that the face she was about

to see would be in keeping with the pleasant place.

She was not disappointed, for the dearest of little Quaker ladies opened to her, with such an air of peace and good-will that the veriest ruffian, coming to molest or make afraid, would have found it impossible to mar the tranquillity of that benign old face, or disturb one fold of the soft muslin crossed upon her breast.

"I come from Mr. Power, and I have a note for Mrs. Sterling," began Christie in her gentlest tone, as her last fear vanished at sight of that mild maternal figure.

"I am she; come in, friend; I am glad to see thee," said the old lady, smiling placidly, as she led the way into a room whose principal furniture seemed to be books, flowers, and sunshine.

The look, the tone, the gentle "thee," went straight to Christie's heart; and, while Mrs. Sterling put on her spectacles and slowly read the note, she stroked the cat and said to herself, "Surely, I have fallen among a set of angels. I thought Mrs. Wilkins a sort of

saint, Mr. Power was an improvement even upon that good soul, and if I am not mistaken this sweet little lady is the best and dearest of all. I do hope she will like me."

"It is quite right, my dear, and I am most glad to see thee; for we need help at this season of the year, and have had none for several weeks. Step up to the room at the head of the stairs, and lay off thy things. Then, if thee is not tired, I will give thee a little job with me in the kitchen," said the old lady, with a kindly directness which left no room for awkwardness on the new-comer's part.

Up went Christie, and after a hasty look round a room as plain and white and still as a nun's cell, she whisked on a working apron and ran down again, feeling, as she fancied the children did in the fairy tale, when they first arrived at the house of the little old woman who lived in the wood.

Mrs. Wilkins's kitchen was as neat as a room could be wherein six children came and went, but this kitchen was tidy with the immaculate order of which Shakers and Quakers

alone seem to possess the secret—a fragrant, shining cleanliness, that made even black kettles ornamental and dish-pans objects of interest. Nothing burned or boiled over, though the stove was full of dinner-pots and skillets. There was no litter or hurry, though the baking of cake and pies was going on; and when Mrs. Sterling put a pan of apples and a knife into her new assistant's hands, saying in a tone that made the request a favour, "Will thee kindly pare these for me?" Christie wondered what would happen if she dropped a seed upon the floor, or did not cut the apples into four exact quarters.

"I never shall suit this dear prim soul," she thought, as her eye went from puss, sedately perched on one small mat, to the dog dozing upon another, and neither offering to stir from their own dominions.

This dainty nicety amused her at first, but she liked it, and very soon her thoughts went back to the old times when she worked with Aunt Betsey, and learned the good old-fashioned arts which now were to prove her fitness for this pleasant place.

Mrs. Sterling saw the shadow that crept into Christie's face, and led the chat to cheerful things, not saying much herself, but beguiling the other to talk, and listening with an interest that made it easy to go on.

Mr. Power and the Wilkinses made them friends very soon; and in an hour or two Christie was moving about the kitchen as if she had already taken possession of her new kingdom.

"Thee likes house-work, I think," said Mrs. Sterling, as she watched her hang up a towel to dry, and rinse her dish-cloth when the cleaning up was done.

"Oh, yes! if I need not do it with a shiftless Irish girl to drive me distracted by pretending to help. I have lived out, and did not find it hard while I had my good Hepsey. I was second girl, and can set a table in style. Shall I try now?" she asked, as the old lady went into a little dining-room with fresh napkins in her hand.

"Yes, but we have no style here. I will show thee once, and hereafter it will be thy work, as thy feet are younger than mine."

A nice old-fashioned table was soon spread, and Christie kept smiling at the contrast between this and Mrs. Stuart's. Chubby little pitchers appeared, delicate old glass, queer china, and tiny tea-spoons; linen as smooth as satin, and a quaint tankard that might have come over in the "May-flower."

"Now, will thee take that pitcher of water to David's room? It is at the top of the house, and may need a little dusting. I have not been able to attend to it as I would like since I have been alone," said Mrs. Sterling.

Rooms usually betray something of the character and tastes of their occupants, and Christie paused a moment as she entered David's, to look about her with feminine interest.

It was the attic, and extended the whole length of the house. One end was curtained off as a bedroom, and she smiled at its austere simplicity.

A gable in the middle made a sunny recess, where were stored bags and boxes of seed, bunches of herbs, and shelves full of those

tiny pots in which baby plants are born and nursed till they can grow alone.

The west end was evidently the study, and here Christie took a good look as she dusted tidily. The furniture was nothing, only an old sofa, with the horse-hair sticking out in tufts here and there; an antique secretary; and a table covered with books. As she whisked the duster down the front of the ancient piece of furniture, one of the doors in the upper half swung open, and Christie saw three objects that irresistibly riveted her eyes for a moment. A broken fan, a bundle of letters tied up with a black ribbon, and a little work-basket in which lay a fanciful needle-book with "Letty" embroidered on it in faded silk.

"Poor David, that is his little shrine, and I have no right to see it," thought Christie, shutting the door with self-reproachful haste.

At the table she paused again, for books always attracted her, and here she saw a goodly array whose names were like the faces of old friends, because she remembered them in her father's library.

Faust was full of ferns, Shakspeare of rough sketches of the men and women whom he has made immortal. Saintly Herbert lay side-by-side with Saint Augustine's confessions. Milton and Montaigne stood socially together, and Andersen's lovely "Märchen" fluttered its pictured leaves in the middle of an open Plato; while several books in unknown tongues were half hidden by volumes of Browning, Keats, and Coleridge.

In the middle of this fine society, slender and transparent as the spirit of a shape, stood a little vase holding one half-opened rose, fresh and fragrant as if just gathered.

Christie smiled as she saw it, and wondered if the dear, dead, or false woman had been fond of roses.

Then her eye went to the mantelpiece, just above the table, and she laughed; for on it stood three busts, idols evidently, but very shabby ones; for Göthe's nose was broken, Schiller's head cracked visibly, and the dust of ages seemed to have settled upon Linnæus in the middle. On the wall above them hung a curious old picture of a monk kneeling in a

devout ecstasy, while the face of an angel is dimly seen through the radiance that floods the cell with divine light. Portraits of Mr. Power and Martin Luther stared thoughtfully at one another from either side, as if making up their minds to shake hands in spite of time and space.

"Melancholy, learned, and sentimental," said Christie to herself, as she settled David's character after these discoveries.

The sound of a bell made her hasten down, more curious than ever to see if this belief was true.

"Perhaps thee had better step out and call my son. Sometimes he does not hear the bell when he is busy. Thee will find my garden-hood and shawl behind the door," said Mrs. Sterling presently; for punctuality was a great virtue in the old lady's eyes.

Christie demurely tied on the little pumpkin-hood, wrapped the grey shawl about her, and set out to find her "master," as she had a fancy to call this unknown David.

From the hints dropped by Mr. Power, and her late discoveries, she had made a hero for

herself; a sort of melancholy Jaques; sad and pale and stern; retired from the world to nurse his wounds in solitude. She rather liked this picture; for romance dies hard in a woman, and, spite of her experiences, Christie still indulged in dreams and fancies. "It will be so interesting to see how he bears his secret sorrow. I am fond of woe; but I do hope he won't be too lackadaisical, for I never could abide that sort of blighted being."

Thinking thus, she peeped here and there, but saw no one in yard or barn, except a workman scraping the mould off his boots near the conservatory.

This David is among the flowers, I fancy; I will just ask, and not bolt in, as he does not know me. "Where is Mr. Sterling?" added Christie aloud, as she approached.

The man looked up, and a smile came into his eyes, as he glanced from the old hood to the young face inside. Then he took off his hat, and held out his hand, saying with just his mother's simple directness,—

"I am David; and this is Christie Devon, I know. How do you do?"

"Yes; dinner's ready," was all she could reply, for the discovery that this was the "master," nearly took her breath away. Not the faintest trace of the melancholy Jaques about him; nothing interesting, romantic, pensive, or even stern. Only a broad-shouldered, brown-bearded man, with an old hat and coat, trousers tucked into his boots, fresh mould on the hand he had given her to shake, and the cheeriest voice she had ever heard.

What a blow it was to be sure! Christie actually felt vexed with him for disappointing her so, and could not recover herself, but stood red and awkward, till, with a last scrape of his boots, David said with placid brevity,—

"Well, shall we go in?"

Christie walked rapidly into the house, and by the time she got there the absurdity of her fancy struck her, and she stifled a laugh in the depths of the little pumpkin-hood as she hung it up. Then, assuming her gravest air, she went to give the finishing touches to dinner.

Ten minutes later she received another surprise; for David appeared washed, brushed,

and in a suit of grey—a personable gentleman, quite unlike the workman in the yard.

Christie gave one look, met a pair of keen yet kind eyes with a suppressed laugh in them, and dropped her own, to be no more lifted up till dinner was done.

It was a very quiet meal, for no one said much; and it was evidently the custom of the house to eat silently, only now and then saying a few friendly words, to show that the hearts were social if the tongues were not.

On the present occasion this suited Christie; and she ate her dinner without making any more discoveries, except that the earth-stained hands were very clean now, and skilfully supplied her wants before she could make them known.

As they rose from table, Mrs. Sterling said, "Davy, does thee want any help this afternoon?"

"I shall be very glad of some in about an hour if thee can spare it, mother."

"I can, dear."

"Do you care for flowers?" asked David,

turning to Christie, "because if you do not this will be a very trying place for you."

"I used to love them dearly; but I have not had any for so long I hardly remember how they look," answered Christie with a sigh, as she recalled Rachel's roses, dead long ago. "Shy, sick, and sad; poor soul, we must lend a hand and cheer her up a bit," thought David, as he watched her eyes turn towards the green things in the windows with a bright, soft look he liked to see.

"Come to the conservatory in an hour, and I'll show you the best part of a 'German,'" he said, with a nod and a smile, as he went away, beginning to whistle like a boy when the door was shut behind him.

"What did he mean?" thought Christie, as she helped clear the table, and put everything in Pimlico order.

She was curious to know, and when Mrs. Sterling said, "Now, my dear, I am going to take my nap, and thee can help David if thee likes," she was quite ready to try the new work.

She would have been more than woman if she had not first slipped up-stairs to smooth her hair, put on a fresh collar, and a black silk apron with certain effective frills and pockets, while a scarlet rigolette replaced the hood, and lent a little colour to her pale cheeks.

"I am a poor ghost of what I was," she thought; "but that's no matter; few can be pretty, any one can be neat, and that is more than ever necessary here."

Then she went away to the conservatory, feeling rather oppressed at the pity and sympathy for which there was no call, and fervently wishing that David would not be so comfortable, for he ate a hearty dinner, laughed four times, and whistled as no heart-broken man would dream of doing.

No one was visible as she went in, and walking slowly down the green aisle, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the lovely place. The damp sweet air made summer there, and a group of slender oriental trees whispered in the breath of the wind that blew in from the open sash. Strange vines and

flowers hung overhead; banks of azaleas, ruddy, white, and purple, bloomed in one place; roses of every hue turned their lovely faces to the sun; ranks of delicate ferns, and heaths with their waxen bells, were close by; glowing geraniums and stately lilies side-by-side; savage-looking scarlet flowers with purple hearts, or orange spikes rising from leaves mottled with strange colours; dusty passion-flowers, and gay nasturtiums climbing to the roof. All manner of beautiful and curious plants were there; and Christie walked among them, happy as a child who finds its playmates again.

Coming to a bed of pansies, she sat down on a rustic chair, and, leaning forward, feasted her eyes on these her favourites. Her face grew young as she looked, her hands touched them with a lingering tenderness as if to her they were half human, and her own eyes were so busy enjoying the gold and purple spread before her, that she did not see another pair peering at her over an unneighbourly old cactus, all prickles and queer knobs. Presently a voice said at her elbow,—

"You look as if you saw something besides pansies there."

David spoke so quietly that it did not startle her, and she answered before she had time to feel ashamed of her fancy,—

"I do; for ever since I was a child I always see a little face when I look at this flower. Sometimes it is a sad one, sometimes it's merry, often roguish, but always a dear little face; and when I see so many together, it's like a flock of children, all nodding and smiling at me at once."

"So it is!" and David nodded, and smiled himself, as he handed her two or three of the finest, as if it was as natural a thing as to put a sprig of mignonette in his own button-hole.

Christie thanked him, and then jumped up, remembering that she came there to work, not to dream. He seemed to understand, and went into a little room near by, saying, as he pointed to a heap of gay flowers on the table,—

"These are to be made into little bouquets for a 'German' to-night. It is pretty work,

and better fitted for a woman's fingers than a man's. This is all you have to do, and you can use your taste as to colours."

While he spoke David laid a red and white carnation on a bit of smilax, tied them together, twisted a morsel of silver foil about the stems, and laid it before Christie as a sample.

"Yes, I can do that, and shall like it very much," she said, burying her nose in the mass of sweetness before her, and feeling as if her new situation grew pleasanter every minute.

"Here is the apron my mother uses; that bit of silk will soon be spoilt, for the flowers are wet," and David gravely offered her a large checked pinafore.

Christie could not help laughing as she put it on: all this was so different from the imaginary picture she had made. She was disappointed, and yet she began to feel as if the simple truth was better than the sentimental fiction, and glanced up at David involuntarily to see if there were any traces of interesting woe about him.

But he was looking at her with the steady, straightforward look which she liked so much,

yet could not meet just yet; and all she saw was that he was smiling also with an indulgent expression as if she was a little girl whom he was trying to amuse.

"Make a few, and I'll be back directly when I have attended to another order;" and he went away thinking Christie's face was very like the pansies they had been talking about —one of the sombre ones with a bright touch of gold deep down in the heart, for thin and pale as the face was, it lighted up at a kind word, and all the sadness vanished out of the anxious eyes when the frank laugh came.

Christie fell to work with a woman's interest in such a pleasant task, and soon tied and twisted skilfully, exercising all her taste in contrasts, and the pretty little conceits flower-lovers can produce. She was so interested, that presently she began to hum half unconsciously, as she was apt to do when happily employed,—

"Welcome, maids of honour,
You do bring
In the spring,
And wait upon her.

She has virgins many,
Fresh and fair,
Yet you are
More sweet than any."

There she stopped, for David's step drew near, and she remembered where she was.

"The last verse is the best in that little poem. Have you forgotten it?" he said, pleased and surprised to find the new-comer singing Herrick's lines "To Violets."

"Almost; my father used to say that when we went looking for early violets, and these lovely ones reminded me of it," explained Christie, rather abashed.

As if to put her at ease David added, as he laid another handful of double-violets on the table,—

"'Y' are the maiden posies,
And so graced,
To be placed
'Fore damask roses.
Yet, though thus respected,
By and by
Ye do lie,
Poor girls, neglected.'"

"I always think of them as pretty, modest maids after that, and can't bear to throw them away, even when faded."

Christie hoped he did not think her sentimental, and changed the conversation by pointing to her work, and saying, in a business-like way,—

"Will these do? I have varied the posies as much as possible, so that they may suit all sorts of tastes and whims. I never went to a 'German' myself; but I have looked on, and remember hearing the young people say the little bouquets didn't mean anything, so I tried to make these expressive."

"Well, I should think you had succeeded excellently, and it is a very pretty fancy. Tell me what some of them mean, will you?"

"You should know better than I, being a florist," said Christie, glad to see he approved of her work.

"I can grow the flowers, but not read them," and David looked rather depressed by his own ignorance of those delicate matters.

Still with the business-like air, Christie held up one after another of the little knots, saying soberly, though her eyes smiled,—

"This white one might be given to a newly-engaged girl, as suggestive of the coming bridal. That half-blown bud would say a great deal from a lover to his idol; and this heliotrope be most encouraging to a timid swain. Here is a rosy daisy for some merry little damsel; there is a scarlet posy for a soldier; this delicate azalea and fern for some lovely creature just out; and there is a bunch of sober pansies for a spinster, if spinsters go to 'Germans.' Heath, scentless but pretty, would do for many; these Parma violets for one with a sorrow; and this curious purple flower with arrow-shaped stamens would just suit a handsome, sharp-tongued woman, if any partner dared give it to her."

David laughed, as his eye went from the flowers to Christie's face, and when she laid down the last breast-knot, looking as if she would like the chance of presenting it to some one she knew, he seemed much amused.

"If the beaux and belles at this party have the wit to read your posies, my fortune will be made, and you will have your hands full

supplying compliments, declarations, rebukes, and criticisms for the fashionable butterflies. I wish I could put consolation, hope, and submission into *my* work as easily, but I am afraid I can't," he added a moment afterward with a changed face, as he began to lay the loveliest white flowers into a box.

"Those are not for a wedding, then?"

"For a dead baby; and I can't seem to find any white and sweet enough."

"You know the people?" asked Christie, with the sympathetic tone in her voice.

"Never saw or heard of them till to-day. Isn't it enough to know that 'baby's dead,' as the poor man said, to make one feel for them?"

"Of course it is; only you seemed so interested in arranging the flowers, I naturally thought it was for some friend," Christie answered hastily, for David looked half indignant at her question.

"I want them to look lovely and comforting when the mother opens the box, and I don't seem to have the right flowers. Will you give it a touch? women have a tender

way of doing such things that we can never learn."

"I don't think I can improve it, unless I add another sort of flower that seems appropriate: may I?"

"Anything you can find."

Christie waited for no more, but ran out of the greenhouse to David's great surprise, and presently came hurrying back with a handful of snow-drops.

"Those are just what I wanted, but I didn't know the little dears were up yet! You shall put them in, and I know they will suggest what you hope to these poor people," he said approvingly, as he placed the box before her, and stood by watching her adjust the little sheaf of pale flowers tied up with a blade of grass. She added a frail fern or two, and did give just the graceful touch here and there which would speak to the mother's sore heart of the tender thought some one had taken for her dead darling.

The box was sent away, and Christie went on with her work, but that little task performed together seemed to have made them friends;

and, while David tied up several grand bouquets at the same table, they talked as if the strangeness was fast melting away from their short acquaintance.

Christie's own manners were so simple, that simplicity in others always put her at her ease: kindness soon banished her reserve, and the desire to show that she was grateful for it helped her to please. David's bluntness was of such a gentle sort that she soon got used to it, and found it a pleasant contrast to the polite insincerity so common. He was as frank and friendly as a boy, yet had a certain paternal way with him which rather annoyed her at first, and made her feel as if he thought her a mere girl, while she was very sure he could not be but a year or two older than herself.

"I'd rather he'd be masterful, and order me about," she thought, still rather regretting the "blighted being" she had not found.

In spite of this she spent a pleasant afternoon, sitting in that sunny place, handling flowers, asking questions about them, and getting the sort of answers she liked; not

dry botanical names and facts, but all the delicate traits, curious habits, and poetical romances of the sweet things, as if the speaker knew and loved them as friends, not merely valued them as merchandize.

They had just finished when the great dog came bouncing in with a basket in his mouth.

"Mother wants eggs: will you come to the barn and get them? Hay is wholesome, and you can feed the doves if you like," said David, leading the way with Bran rioting about him.

"Why don't he offer to put up a swing for me, or get me a doll? It's the pinafore that deceives him. Never mind: I rather like it after all," thought Christie; but she left the apron behind her, and followed with the most dignified air.

It did not last long, however, for the sights and sounds that greeted her, carried her back to the days of egg-hunting in Uncle Enos's big barn; and, before she knew it, she was rustling through the hay mows, talking to the cow, and receiving the attentions of

Bran with a satisfaction it was impossible to conceal.

The hens gathered about her feet, cocking their expectant eyes at her; the doves came circling round her head; the cow stared placidly, and the inquisitive horse responded affably when she offered him a handful of hay.

"How tame they all are! I like animals, they are so contented and intelligent," she said, as a plump dove lit on her shoulder with an impatient coo.

"That was Kitty's pet, she always fed the fowls. Would you like to do it?" and David offered her a little measure of oats.

"Very much;" and Christie began to scatter the grain, wondering who "Kitty" was.

As if he saw the wish in her face, David added, while he shelled corn for the hens,—

"She was the little girl who was with us last. Her father kept her in a factory, and took all her wages, barely giving her clothes and food enough to keep her alive. The poor child ran away, and was trying to hide when

Mr. Power found and sent her here to be cared for."

"As he did me?" said Christie quickly.

"Yes, that's a way he has."

"A very kind and Christian way. Why didn't she stay?"

"Well, it was rather quiet for the lively little thing, and rather too near the city, so we got a good place up in the country where she could go to school and learn housework. The mill had left her no time for these things, and at fifteen she was as ignorant as a child."

"You must miss her."

"I do very much."

"Was she pretty?"

"She looked like a little rose sometimes," and David smiled to himself as he fed the grey hens.

Christie immediately made a picture of the "lively little thing" with a face "like a rose," and was uncomfortably conscious that she did not look half as well feeding doves as Kitty must have done.

Just then David handed her the basket, saying in the paternal way that half amused,

half piqued her: "It is getting too chilly for you here: take these in, please, and I'll bring the milk directly."

In spite of herself she smiled, as a sudden vision of the elegant Mr. Fletcher, devotedly carrying her book or beach-basket, passed through her mind; then hastened to explain the smile, for David lifted his brows inquiringly, and glanced about him to see what amused her.

"I beg your pardon: I've lived alone so much that it seems a little odd to be told to do things, even if they are as easy and pleasant as this."

"I am so used to taking care of people, and directing, that I do so without thinking. I won't if you don't like it," and he put out his hand to take back the basket with a grave, apologetic air.

"But I do like it; only it amused me to be treated like a little girl again, when I am nearly thirty, and feel seventy at least, life has been so hard to me lately."

Her face sobered at the last words, and David's instantly grew so pitiful she could

not keep her eyes on it lest they should fill, so suddenly did the memory of past troubles overcome her.

"I know," he said, in a tone that warmed her heart, "I know, but we are going to try, and make life easier for you now, and you must feel that this is home and we are friends."

"I do!" and Christie flushed with grateful feeling and a little shame, as she went in, thinking to herself, "How silly I was to say that! I may have spoilt the simple friendliness that was so pleasant, and have made him think me a foolish, stuck-up old creature."

Whatever he might have thought, David's manner was unchanged when he came in and found her busy with the table.

"It's pleasant to see thee resting, mother, and everything going on so well," he said, glancing about the room, where the old lady sat, and nodding toward the kitchen, where Christie was toasting bread in her neatest manner.

"Yes, Davy, it was about time I had a helper for thy sake, at least; and this is a

great improvement upon heedless Kitty, I am inclined to think."

Mrs. Sterling dropped her voice over that last sentence; but Christie heard it, and was pleased. A moment or two later, David came toward her with a glass in his hand, saying, as if rather doubtful of his reception,—

"New milk is part of the cure: will you try it?"

For the first time, Christie looked straight up in the honest eyes that seemed to demand honesty in others, and took the glass, answering heartily,—

"Yes, thank you; I drink good health to you, and better manners to me."

The newly-lighted lamp shone full in her face, and though it was neither young nor blooming, it showed something better than youth and bloom to one who could read the subtle language of character as David could. He nodded as he took the glass, and went away saying quietly,—

"We are plain people here, and you won't find it hard to get on with us, I think."

But he liked the candid look, and thought

about it, as he chopped kindlings, whistling with a vigour which caused Christie to smile as she strained the milk.

After tea a spider-legged table was drawn out towards the hearth, where an open fire burned cheerily, and puss purred on the rug. with Bran near by. David unfolded his newspapers, Mrs. Sterling pinned on her knitting-sheath, and Christie sat a moment enjoying the comfortable little scene. She sighed without knowing it, and Mrs. Sterling asked quickly,—

"Is thee tired, my dear?"

"Oh, no! only happy."

"I am glad of that: I was afraid thee would find it dull."

"It's beautiful!" then Christie checked herself, feeling that these outbursts would not suit such quiet people; and, half ashamed of showing how much she felt, she added soberly, "If you will give me something to do I shall be quite contented."

"Sewing is not good for thee. If thee likes to knit I'll set up a sock for thee to-morrow," said the old lady, well pleased

at the industrious turn of her new hand-maid.

"I like to darn, and I see some to be done in this basket. May I do it?" and Christie laid hold of the weekly job which even the best housewives are apt to set aside for pleasanter tasks.

"As thee likes, my dear. My eyes will not let me sew much in the evening, else I should have finished that batch to-night. Thee will find the yarn and needles in the little bag."

So Christie fell to work on grey socks and neat lavender-coloured hose, while the old lady knit swiftly, and David read aloud. Christie thought she was listening to the report of a fine lecture; but her ear only caught the words, for her mind wandered away into a region of its own, and lived there till her task was done. Then she laid the tidy pile in the basket, drew her chair to a corner of the hearth, and quietly enjoyed herself.

The cat, feeling sure of a welcome, got up into her lap, and went to sleep in a cosy bunch; Bran laid his nose across her feet,

and blinked at her with sleepy good-will, while her eyes wandered round the room, from its quaint furniture and the dreaming flowers in the windows, to the faces of its occupants, and lingered there.

The plain border of a Quaker cap encircled that mild old face, with bands of silver hair parted on a forehead marked with many lines. But the eyes were clear and sweet; winter roses bloomed in the cheeks, and an exquisite neatness pervaded the small figure, from the trim feet on the stool to the soft shawl folded about the shoulders, as only a Quakeress can fold one. In Mrs. Sterling, piety and peace made old age lovely, and the mere presence of this tranquil soul seemed to fill the room with a reposeful charm none could resist.

The other face possessed no striking comeliness of shape or colour; but the brown, becoming beard made it manly, and the broad arch of a benevolent brow added nobility to features otherwise not beautiful,—a face plainly expressing resolution and rectitude, inspiring respect as naturally as a certain

protective kindliness of manner won confidence; even in repose wearing a vigilant look as if some hidden pain or passion lay in wait to surprise and conquer the sober cheerfulness that softened the lines of the firm-set lips, and warmed the glance of the thoughtful eyes.

Christie fancied she possessed the key to this, and longed to know all the story of the cross which Mr. Power said David had learned to bear so well. Then she began to wonder if they could like and keep her, to hope so, and to feel that here at last she was at home with friends. But the old sadness crept over her, as she remembered how often she had thought this before, and how soon the dream ended, the ties were broken, and she adrift again.

"Ah, well," she said within herself, "I won't think of the morrow, but take the good that comes and enjoy it while I may. I must not disappoint Rachel, since she kept her word so nobly to me. Dear soul, when shall I see her again?"

The thought of Rachel always touched her

heart, more now than ever; and, as she leaned back in her chair with closed eyes and idle hands, these tender memories made her unconscious face most eloquent. The eyes peering over the spectacles telegraphed a meaning message to the other eyes glancing over the paper now and then; and both these friends in deed as well as name felt assured that this woman needed all the comfort they could give her. But the busy needles never stopped their click, and the sonorous voice read on without a pause, so Christie never knew what mute confidences passed between mother and son, or what helpful confessions her traitorous face had made for her.

The clock struck nine, and these primitive people prepared for rest; for their day began at dawn, and much wholesome work made sleep a luxury.

"Davy will tap at thy door as he goes down in the morning, and I will soon follow to show thee about matters. Good-night, and good rest, my child."

So speaking, the little lady gave Christie a maternal kiss; David shook hands; and then

she went away, wondering why service was so lightened by such little kindnesses.

As she lay in her narrow white bed, with the "pale light of stars" filling the quiet, cell-like room, and some one playing softly on a flute overhead, she felt as if she had left the troublous world behind her, and shutting out want, solitude, and despair, had come into some safe, secluded spot full of flowers and sunshine, kind hearts, and charitable deeds.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE STRAWBERRY BED.

FROM that day a new life began for Christie, a happy, quiet, useful life, utterly unlike any of the brilliant futures she had planned for herself; yet indescribably pleasant to her now, for past experience had taught her its worth, and made her ready to enjoy it.

Never had spring seemed so early or so fair, never had such a crop of hopeful thoughts and happy feelings sprung up in her heart as now; and nowhere was there a brighter face, a blither voice, or more willing hands than Christie's when the apple blossoms came.

This was what she needed, the protection of a home, wholesome cares and duties; and, best of all, friends to live and labour for, loving and beloved. Her whole soul was in

her work now, and as health returned, much of the old energy and cheerfulness came with it, a little sobered, but more sweet and earnest than ever. No task was too hard or humble; no day long enough to do all she longed to do; and no sacrifice would have seemed too great for those whom she regarded with steadily increasing love and gratitude.

Up at dawn, the dewy freshness of the hour, the morning rapture of the birds, the daily miracle of sunrise, set her heart in tune, and gave her Nature's most healing balm. She kept the little house in order, with Mrs. Sterling to direct and share the labour so pleasantly, that mistress and maid soon felt like mother and daughter, and Christie often said she did not care for any other wages.

The house-work of this small family was soon done, and then Christie went to tasks that she liked better. Much out-of-door life was good for her, and in garden and greenhouse there was plenty of light labour she could do. So she grubbed contentedly in the wholesome earth, weeding and potting, learning to prune and bud, and finding Mrs.

Wilkins was quite right in her opinion of the sanitary virtues of dirt.

Trips to town to see the good woman and carry country gifts to the little folks; afternoon drives with Mrs. Sterling in the old-fashioned chaise, drawn by the Roman-nosed horse, and Sunday pilgrimages to church to be "righted up" by one of Mr. Power's stirring sermons, were among her new pleasures. But, on the whole, the evenings were her happiest times: for then David read aloud while she worked; she sang to the old piano tuned for her use; or, better still, as spring came on, they sat in the porch, and talked as people only do talk when twilight, veiling the outer world, seems to lift the curtains of that inner world where minds go exploring, hearts learn to know one another, and souls walk together in the cool of the day.

At such times Christie seemed to catch glimpses of another David than the busy, cheerful man apparently contented with the humdrum duties of an obscure, laborious life, and the few unexciting pleasures afforded by books, music, and much silent thought. She

sometimes felt, with a woman's instinct, that under this composed, commonplace existence another life went on; for, now and then, in the interest of conversation, or the involuntary yielding to a confidential impulse, a word, a look, a gesture, betrayed an unexpected power and passion, a secret unrest, a bitter memory that would not be ignored.

Only at rare moments did she catch these glimpses, and so brief, so indistinct were they that she half believed her own lively fancy created them. She longed to know more; but "David's trouble" made him sacred in her eyes from any prying curiosity, and always after one of these twilight betrayals Christie found him so like his unromantic self next day, that she laughed and said,—

"I never shall outgrow my foolish way of trying to make people other than they are. Gods are gone, heroes hard to find, and one should be contented with good men, even if they do wear old clothes, lead prosaic lives, and have no accomplishments but gardening, playing the flute, and keeping their temper."

She felt the influences of that friendly place at once; but for a time she wondered at the natural way in which kind things were done, the protective care extended over her, and the confiding air with which these people treated her. They asked no questions, demanded no explanations, seemed unconscious of conferring favours, and took her into their life so readily that she marvelled, even while she rejoiced, at the good fortune which led her there.

She understood this better when she discovered, what Mr. Power had not mentioned, that the little cottage was a sort of refuge for many women like herself; a half-way house where they could rest and recover themselves after the wrongs, defeats, and weariness that come to such in the battle of life.

With a chivalry older and finer than any Spenser sung, Mr. Power befriended these forlorn souls, and David was his faithful squire. Whoever knocked at that low door was welcomed, warmed, and fed; comforted, and set on their way, cheered and strengthened by the sweet good-will that made charity

no burden, and restored to the more desperate and despairing their faith in human nature and God's love.

There are many such green spots in this world of ours, which often seems so bad that a second Deluge could hardly wash it clean again; and these beneficent, unostentatious asylums are the salvation of more troubled souls than many a great institution gilded all over with the rich bequests of men who find themselves too heavily laden to enter in at the narrow gate of heaven.

Happy the foot-sore, heart-weary traveller who turns from the crowded, dusty highway down the green lane that leads to these humble inns, where the sign of the Good Samaritan is written on the face of whomsoever opens to the stranger, and refreshment for soul and body is freely given in the name of Him who loved the poor.

Mr. Power came now and then, for his large parish left him but little time to visit any but the needy. Christie enjoyed these brief visits heartily, for her new friends soon felt that she was one of them, and cordially took

her into the large circle of workers and believers to which they belonged.

Mr. Power's heart was truly an orphan asylum, and every lonely creature found a welcome there. He could rebuke sin sternly, yet comfort and uplift the sinner with fatherly compassion; righteous wrath would flash from his eyes at injustice, and contempt sharpen his voice as he denounced hypocrisy: yet the eyes that lightened would dim with pity for a woman's wrong, a child's small sorrow; and the voice that thundered would whisper consolation like a mother, or give counsel with a wisdom books cannot teach.

He was a Moses in his day and generation, born to lead his people out of the bondage of dead superstitions, and go before them through a Red Sea of persecution into the larger liberty and love all souls hunger for, and many are just beginning to find as they come doubting, yet desiring, into the goodly land such pioneers as he have planted in the wilderness.

He was like a tonic to weak natures and wavering wills; and Christie felt a general

revival going on within herself as her knowledge, honour, and affection for him grew. His strength seemed to uphold her; his integrity to rebuke all unworthiness in her own life; and the magic of his generous, genial spirit to make the hard places smooth, the bitter things sweet, and the world seem a happier, honester place than she had ever thought it since her father died.

Mr. Power had been interested in her from the first; had watched her through other eyes, and tried her by various unsuspected tests. She stood them well; showed her faults as frankly as her virtues, and tried to deserve their esteem by copying the excellencies she admired in them.

"She is made of the right stuff, and we must keep her among us! for she must not be lost or wasted by being left to drift about the world with no ties to make her safe and happy. She is doing so well here, let her stay till the restless spirit begins to stir again; then she shall come to me and learn contentment by seeing greater troubles than her own."

Mr. Power said this one day as he rose to go, after sitting an hour with Mrs. Sterling, and hearing from her a good report of his new *protégée*. The young people were out at work, and had not been called in to see him, for the interview had been a confidential one. But as he stood at the gate he saw Christie in the strawberry bed, and went towards her, glad to see how well and happy she looked.

Her hat was hanging on her shoulders, and the sun giving her cheeks a healthy colour; she was humming to herself like a bee as her fingers flew, and once she paused, shaded her eyes with her hand, and took a long look at a figure down in the meadow; then she worked on silent and smiling,—a pleasant creature to see, though her hair was ruffled by the wind, her gingham gown pinned up, and her fingers deeply stained with the blood of many berries.

"I wonder if that means any thing?" thought Mr. Power, with a keen glance from the distant man to the busy woman close at hand. "It might be a helpful, happy thing for both, if poor David only could forget."

He had time for no more castle-building, for a startled robin flew away with a shrill chirp, and Christie looked up.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she said, rising quickly. "I was picking a special box for you, and now you can have a feast besides, just as you like it, fresh from the vines. Sit here, please, and I'll hull faster than you can eat."

"This *is* luxury!" and Mr. Power sat down on the three-legged stool offered him, with a rhubarb leaf on his knee which Christie kept supplying with delicious mouthfuls.

"Well, and how goes it? Are we still happy and contented here?" he asked.

"I feel as if I had been born again; as if this was a new heaven and a new earth, and everything was as it should be," answered Christie, with a look of perfect satisfaction in her face.

"That's a pleasant hearing. Mrs. Sterling has been praising you, but I wanted to be sure you were as satisfied as she. And how does David wear? well, I hope."

"Oh, yes, he is very good to me, and is teaching me to be a gardener, so that I

needn't kill myself with sewing any more. Much of this is fine work for women, and *so* healthy. Don't I look a different creature from the ghost that came here three or four months ago?" and she turned her face for inspection like a child.

"Yes, David is a good gardener. I often send my sort of plants here, and he always makes them grow and blossom sooner or later," answered Mr. Power, regarding her like a beneficent genie on a three-legged stool.

"You are the fresh air, and Mrs. Sterling is the quiet sunshine that does the work, I fancy. David only digs about the roots."

"Thank you for my share of the compliment; but why say 'only digs'? That is a most important part of the work: I'm afraid you don't appreciate David."

"Oh, yes, I do; but he rather aggravates me sometimes," said Christie, laughing, as she put a particularly big berry in the green plate to atone for her frankness.

"How?" asked Mr. Power, interested in these little revelations.

"Well, he *won't* be ambitious. I try to stir him up, for he has talents; I've found that out: but he won't seem to care for anything but watching over his mother, reading his old books, and making flowers bloom double when they ought to be single."

"There are worse ambitions than those, Christie. I know many a man who would be far better employed in cherishing a sweet old woman, studying Plato, and doubling the beauty of a flower, than in selling principles for money, building up a cheap reputation that dies with him, or chasing pleasures that turn to ashes in his mouth."

"Yes, sir; but isn't it natural for a young man to have some personal aim or aspiration to live for? If David was a weak or dull man I could understand it; but I seem to feel a power, a possibility for something higher and better than anything I see, and this frets me. He is so good, I want him to be great also in some way."

"A wise man says, 'The essence of greatness is the perception that virtue is enough.' *I* think David one of the most ambitious men I

ever knew, because at thirty he has discovered this truth, and taken it to heart. Many men can be what the world calls great: very few men are what God calls good. This is the harder task to choose, yet the only success that satisfies, the only honour that outlives death. These faithful lives, whether seen of men or hidden in corners, are the salvation of the world, and few of us fail to acknowledge it in the hours when we are brought close to the heart of things, and see a little as God sees."

Christie did not speak for a moment: Mr. Power's voice had been so grave, and his words so earnest that she could not answer lightly, but sat turning over the new thoughts in her mind; presently she said, in a penitent but not quite satisfied tone,—

"Of course, you are right, sir. I'll try not to care for the outward and visible signs of these hidden virtues; but I'm afraid I still shall have a hankering for the worldly honours that are so valued by most people."

"'Success and glory are the children of hard work and God's favour,' according to

Æschylus, and you will find he was right. David got a heavy blow some years ago, as I told you, I think; and he took it hard, but it did not spoil him: it made a man of him; and, if I am not much mistaken, he will yet do something to be proud of, though the world may never hear of it."

"I hope so!" and Christie's face brightened at the thought.

"Nevertheless you look as if you doubted it, oh, you of little faith. Every one has two sides to his nature; David has shown you the least interesting one, and you judge accordingly. I think he will show you the other side some day, for you are one of the women who win confidence without trying,—and then you will know the real David. Don't expect too much, or quarrel with the imperfections that make him human; but take him for what he is worth, and help him, if you can, to make his life a brave and good one."

"I will, sir," answered Christie, so meekly that Mr. Power laughed; for this confessional in the strawberry bed amused him very much.

"You are a hero-worshipper, my dear; and if people don't come up to the mark, you are so disappointed that you fail to see the fine reality which remains when the pretty romance ends. Saints walk about the world to-day as much as ever, but instead of hair-cloth and halos they now wear—"

"Broadcloth and wide-brimmed hats," added Christie looking up as if she had already found a better St. Thomas than any the Church ever canonized.

He thanked her with a smile, and went on, with a glance towards the meadow,—

"And knights go crusading as gallantly as ever against the giants and the dragons, though you don't discover it, because, instead of banner, lance, and shield they carry—"

"Bushel-baskets, spades, and sweet-flag for their mothers," put in Christie again, as David came up the path with the loam he had been digging.

Both began to laugh, and he joined in the merriment without knowing why, as he put down his load, took off his hat, and shook hands with his honoured guest.

"What's the joke?" he asked, refreshing himself with the handful of berries Christie offered him.

"Don't tell," she whispered, looking dismayed at the idea of letting him know what she had said of him.

But Mr. Power answered tranquilly,—

"We were talking about coins, and Christie was expressing her opinion of one I showed her. The face and date she understands; but the motto puzzles her, and she has not seen the reverse side yet, so does not know its value. She will some day; and then she will agree with me, I think, that it is *sterling* gold."

The emphasis on the last words enlightened David: his sunburnt cheek reddened, but he only shook his head, saying, "She will find a brass farthing, I'm afraid, sir," and began to crumble a handful of loam about the roots of a carnation that seemed to have sprung up by chance at the foot of the apple-tree.

"How did that get there?" asked Christie, with sudden interest in the flower.

"It dropped when I was setting out the

others, took root, and looked so pretty and comfortable, that I left it. These waifs sometimes do better than the most carefully tended ones: I only dig round them a bit and leave them to sun and air."

Mr. Power looked at Christie with so much meaning in his face that it was her turn to colour now. But with feminine perversity she would not own herself mistaken, and answered, with eyes as full of meaning as his own,—

"I like the single ones best: double-carnations are so untidy, all bursting out of the calyx as if the petals had quarrelled, and could not live together."

"The single ones are seldom perfect, and look poor and incomplete, with little scent or beauty," said unconscious David, propping up the thin-leaved flower, that looked like a pale solitary maiden beside the great crimson and white carnations near by filling the air with spicy odour.

"I suspect you will change your mind by and by, Christie, as your taste improves, and you will learn to think the double ones the

handsomest, added Mr. Power, wondering in his benevolent heart if he would ever be the gardener to mix the colours of the two human plants before him.

"I must go," and David shouldered his basket as if he felt he might be in the way.

"So must I, or they will be waiting for me at the hospital. Give me a handful of flowers, David: they often do the poor souls more good than my prayers or preaching."

Then they went away, and left Christie sitting in the strawberry bed, thinking that David looked less than ever like a hero with his blue shirt, rough straw hat, and big boots; also wondering if he *would* ever show her his best side, and if she would like it when she saw it.

## CHAPTER III.

### CHRISTIE'S GALA.

ON the 4th of September Christie woke up, saying to herself, "It is my birthday, but no one knows it, so I shall get no presents. Ah, well, I'm too old for that now, I suppose;" but she sighed as she said it, for well she knew one never is too old to be remembered and beloved.

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Sterling entered, carrying what looked very much like a pile of snow-flakes in her arms. Laying this upon the bed, she kissed Christie, saying, with a tone and gesture that made the words a benediction,—

"A happy birthday, and God bless thee, my daughter!"

Before Christie could do more than hug

both gift and giver, a great bouquet came flying in at the open window, aimed with such skill that it fell upon the bed, while David's voice called out from below,—

"A happy birthday, Christie, and many of them!"

"How sweet, how kind of you, this is! I didn't dream you knew about to-day, and never thought of such a beautiful surprise," cried Christie, touched and charmed by this unexpected celebration.

"Thee mentioned it once long ago, and we remembered. They are very humble gifts, my dear; but we could not let the day pass without some token of the thanks we owe thee for these months of faithful service and affectionate companionship."

Christie had no answer to this little address, and was about to cry as the only adequate expression of her feelings, when a hearty "Hear, hear!" from below made her laugh and call out,—

"You conspirators! how dare you lay plots, and then exult over me when I can't find words to thank you? I always did think you

were a set of angels, and now I'm quite sure of it."

"Thee may be right about Davy, but *I* am only a prudent old woman, and have taken much pleasure in privately knitting this light wrap to wear when thee sits in the porch, for the evenings will soon grow chilly. My son did not know what to get, and finally decided that flowers would suit thee best; so he made a bunch of those thee loves, and would toss it in as if he was a boy."

"I like that way, and both my presents suit me exactly," said Christie, wrapping the fleecy shawl about her and admiring the nosegay, in which her quick eye saw all her favourites, even to a plumy spray of the little wild asters which she loved so much.

"Now, child, I will step down and see about breakfast. Take thy time; for this is to be a holiday, and we mean to make it a happy one if we can."

With that the old lady went away, and Christie soon followed, looking very fresh and blithe as she ran down smiling behind her great bouquet. David was in the porch, training up the morning-glories that bloomed

late and lovely in that sheltered spot. He turned as she approached, held out his hand, and bent a little as if he was moved to add a tenderer greeting. But he did not, only held the hand she gave him for a moment, as he said, with the paternal expression unusually visible,—

"I wish you many happy birthdays; and if you go on getting younger every year like this, you will surely have them."

It was the first compliment he had ever paid her, and she liked it, though she shook her head, as if disclaiming it, and answered brightly,—

"I used to think many years would be burdensome, and just before I came here I felt as if I could not bear another one. But now I like to live, and hope I shall a long, long time."

"I'm glad of that; and how do you mean to spend these long years of yours?" asked David, brushing back the lock of hair that was always falling into his eyes, as if he wanted to see more clearly the hopeful face before him.

"In doing what your morning-glories do—

climb up as far and as fast as I can before the frost comes," answered Christie, looking at the pretty symbols she had chosen.

"You have got on a good way already, then," began David, smiling at her fancy.

"Oh, no, I haven't!" she said quickly. "I'm only about half-way up. See here: I'll tell how it is;" and, pointing to the different parts of the flowery wall, she added in her earnest way, "I've watched these grow, and had many thoughts about them as I sat sewing in the porch. These variegated ones down low are my childish fancies; most of them gone to seed, you see. These lovely blue ones of all shades are my girlish dreams and hopes and plans. Poor things! some are dead, some torn by the wind, and only a few pale ones left quite perfect. Here you observe they grow sombre with a tinge of purple; that means pain and gloom, and there is where I was when I came here. Now they turn from those sad colours to crimson, rose, and soft pink. That's the happiness and health I found here. You and your dear

mother planted them, and you see how strong and bright they are."

She lifted up her hand, and, gathering one of the great rosy cups, offered it to him as if it were brimful of the thanks she could not utter. He comprehended, took it with a quiet "Thank you," and stood looking at it for a moment, as if her little compliment pleased him very much.

"And these?" he said presently, pointing to the delicate violet bells that grew next the crimson ones.

The colour deepened a shade in Christie's cheek, but she went on with no other sign of shyness; for with David she always spoke out frankly, because she could not help it,—

"Those mean love to me, not passion; the deep red ones half hidden under the leaves mean that. My violet flowers are the best and purest love we can know, the sort that makes life beautiful and lasts for ever. The white ones that come next are tinged with that soft colour here and there, and they mean holiness. I know there will be love in

heaven; so, whether I ever find it here or not, I am sure I shall not miss it wholly."

Then, as if glad to leave the theme that never can be touched without reverent emotion by a true woman, she added, looking up to where a few spotless blossoms shone like silver in the light,—

"Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I cannot reach them; but I can look up and see their beauty; believe in them and try to follow where they lead; remember that frost comes latest to those that bloom the highest; and keep my beautiful white flowers as long as I can."

"The mush is ready; come to breakfast, children," called Mrs. Sterling, as she crossed the hall with a teapot in her hand.

Christie's face fell; then she exclaimed, laughing, "That's always the way; I never take a poetic flight but in comes the mush and spoils it all."

"Not a bit; and that's where women are mistaken. Souls and bodies should go on together, and you will find that a hearty breakfast won't spoil the little hymn the

morning-glories sang;" and David set her a good example by eating two bowls of hasty-pudding and milk, with the lovely flower in his button-hole.

"Now, what are we to do next?" asked Christie, when the usual morning work was finished.

"In about ten minutes thee will see, I think," answered Mrs. Sterling, glancing at the clock, and smiling at the bright expectant look in the younger woman's eyes.

She did see, for in less than ten minutes the rumble of an omnibus was heard, a sound of many voices, and then the whole Wilkins brood came whooping down the lane. It was good to see Ma Wilkins jog ponderously after in full state and festival array, her bonnet trembling with bows, red roses all over her gown, and a parasol of uncommon brilliancy brandished joyfully in her hand. It was better still to see her hug Christie, when the latter emerged, flushed and breathless, from the chaos of arms, legs, and chubby faces in which she was lost for several tumultuous moments; and it was best of all to see the good woman

place her cherished "bunnit" in the middle of the parlour table as a choice and lovely ornament, administer the family pocket-handkerchief all round, and then settle down with a hearty,—

"Wal, now, Mis Sterlin', you've no idee how tickled we all was when Mr. David came and told us you was goin' to have a galy here to-day. It was so kind of providential, for Lisha was invited out to a day's pleasurin', so I could leave jest as wal as not. The childern's ben hankerin' to come the wust kind, and go plummin' as they did last month, though I told 'em berries was gone weeks ago. I reely thought I'd never get 'em here whole, they trained so in that bus. Wash would go on the step, and kep fallin' off; Gusty's hat blew out a winder; them two bad boys tumbled round loose; and dear little Victory set like a lady, only I found she'd got both feet in the basket right atop of the birthday cake I made a puppose for Christie."

"It hasn't hurt it a bit; there was a cloth over it, and I like it all the better for the marks of Totty's little feet, bless 'em!" and

Christie cuddled the culprit with one hand while she revealed the damaged delicacy with the other, wondering inwardly what evil star was always in the ascendant when Mrs. Wilkins made cake.

"Now, my dear, you jest go and have a good frolic with them childern. I'm a-goin' to git dinner, and you a-goin' to play, so we don't want to see no more of you till the bell rings," said Mrs. Wilkins, pinning up her gown and "shooing" her brood out of the room, which they entirely filled.

Catching up her hat, Christie obeyed, feeling as much like a child as any of the excited six. The revels that followed no pen can justly record, for Goths and Vandals on the rampage but feebly describes the youthful Wilkinses when their spirits effervesced after a month's bottling up in close home quarters.

David locked the greenhouse door the instant he saw them, and pervaded the premises generally like a most affable but very watchful policeman, for the ravages those innocents committed much afflicted him. Yet he never had the heart to say a word of reproof when

he saw their raptures over dandelions, the relish with which they devoured fruit, and the good it did the little souls and bodies to enjoy unlimited liberty, green grass, and country air, even for a day.

Christie usually got them into the big meadow as soon as possible, and there let them gambol at will, while she sat on the broken bough of an apple-tree and watched her flock like an old-fashioned shepherdess. To-day she did so, and when the children were happily sailing boats, tearing to and fro like wild colts, or discovering the rustic treasures Nurse Nature lays ready to gladden little hearts and hands, Christie sat idly making a garland of green brakes, and ruddy sumach leaves ripened before the early frosts had come.

David saw her there, and, feeling that he might come off guard for a time, went strolling down to lean upon the wall, and chat in the friendly fashion that had naturally grown up between these fellow-workers. She was waiting for the new supply of ferns little Adelaide was getting for her by the wall, and

while she waited she sat resting her cheek upon her hand, and smiling to herself, as if she saw some pleasant picture in the green grass at her feet.

"Now I wonder what she's thinking about," said David's voice close by, and Christie straightway answered,—

"Philip Fletcher."

"And who is he?" asked David, settling his elbow in a comfortable niche between the mossy stones, so that he could "lean and loaf" at his ease.

"The brother of the lady whose children I took care of;" and Christie wished she had thought before she answered that first question, for in telling her adventures at different times she had omitted all mention of this gentleman.

"Tell about him, as the children say: your experiences are always interesting, and you look as if this man was uncommonly entertaining in some way," said David, indolently inclined to be amused.

"Oh dear no, not at all entertaining! invalids seldom are, and he was sick and lazy,

conceited and very cross sometimes." Christie's heart rather smote her as she said this, remembering the last look poor Fletcher gave her.

"A nice man, to be sure; but I don't see anything to smile about," persisted David, who liked reasons for things; a masculine trait often very trying to feminine minds.

"I was thinking of a little quarrel we once had. He found out that I had been an actress; for I basely did not mention that fact when I took the place, and so got properly punished for my deceit. I thought he'd tell his sister, of course, so I did it myself, and retired from the situation as much disgusted with Christie Devon as you are."

"Perhaps I ought to be, but I don't find that I am. Do you know I think that old Fletcher was a sneak!" and David looked as if he would rather like to mention his opinion to that gentleman.

"He probably thought he was doing his duty to the children: few people would approve of an actress for a teacher, you know.

He had seen me play, and remembered it all of a sudden, and told me of it; that was the way it came about," said Christie hastily, feeling that she must get out of the scrape as soon as possible, or she would be driven to tell everything in justice to Mr. Fletcher.

"I should like to see you act."

"You a Quaker, and express such a worldly and dreadful wish!" cried Christie, much amused, and very grateful that his thoughts had taken a new direction.

"I'm not, and never have been. Mother married out of the sect, and, though she keeps many of her old ways, always left me free to believe what I chose. I wear drab because I like it, and say 'thee' to her because she likes it, and it is pleasant to have a little word all our own. I've been to theatres, but I don't care much for them. Perhaps I should if I'd had Fletcher's luck in seeing *you* play."

"You didn't lose much: I was not a good actress; though now and then, when I liked my part, I did pretty well, they said," answered Christie modestly.

"Why didn't you go back after the accident?" asked David, who had heard that part of the story.

"I felt that it was bad for me, and so retired into private life."

"Do you ever regret it?"

"Sometimes when the restless fit is on me; but not so often now as I used to do; for on the whole I'd rather *be* a woman than *act* a queen."

"Good!" said David, and then added persuasively, "But you *will* play for me some time, won't you? I've a curious desire to see you do it."

"Perhaps I'll try," replied Christie, flattered by his interest, and not unwilling to display her little talent.

"Who are you making that for? it's very pretty," asked David, who seemed to be in an inquiring frame of mind that day.

"Any one who wants it. I only do it for the pleasure. I always liked pretty things; but since I have lived among flowers and natural people, I seem to care more than ever for beauty of all kinds, and love to make it if

I can, without stopping for any reason but the satisfaction."

"'Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for being,'"

observed David, who had a weakness for poetry, and, finding she liked his sort, quoted to Christie almost as freely as to himself.

"Exactly, so look at that and enjoy it," and she pointed to the child standing knee-deep in graceful ferns, looking as if she grew there, a living buttercup, with her buff frock off at one plump shoulder and her bright hair shining in the sun.

Before David could express his admiration, the little picture was spoilt; for Christie called out, "Come, Vic, bring me some more pretties!" startling baby so that she lost her balance, and disappeared with a muffled cry, leaving nothing to be seen but a pair of small convulsive shoes, soles uppermost, among the brakes. David took a leap, reversed Vic, and then let her compose her little feelings by sticking bits of green in all the button-holes of his coat, as he sat on the wall while

she stood beside him in the safe shelter of his arm.

"You are very like an Englishman," said Christie, after watching the pair for a few minutes.

"How do you know?" asked David, looking surprised.

"There were several in our company, and I found them very much alike. Blunt and honest, domestic and kind; hard to get at, but true as steel when once won; not so brilliant and original as Americans, perhaps, but more solid and steadfast. On the whole, I think them the manliest men in the world," answered Christie, in the decided way young people have of expressing their opinions.

"You speak as if you had known and studied a great variety of men," said David, feeling that he need not resent the comparison she had made.

"I have, and it has done me good. Women who stand alone in the world, and have their own way to make, have a better chance to know men truly than those who sit safe at home and only see one side of mankind. We

lose something; but I think we gain a great deal that is more valuable than admiration, flattery, and the superficial service most men give to our sex. Some one says, 'Companionship teaches men and women to know, judge, and treat one another justly." I believe it; for we who are compelled to be fellow-workers with men understand and value them more truly than many a belle who has a dozen lovers sighing at her feet. I see their faults and follies; but I also see so much to honour, love, and trust, that I feel as if the world was full of brothers. Yes, as a general rule, men have been kinder to me than women; and if I wanted a stanch friend, I'd choose a man, for they wear better than women, who ask too much, and cannot see that friendship lasts longer if a little respect and reserve go with the love and confidence."

Christie had spoken soberly, with no thought of flattery or effect; for the memory of many kindnesses bestowed on her by many men, from rough Joe Butterfield to Mr. Power, gave warmth and emphasis to her words.

The man sitting on the wall appreciated the compliment to his sex, and proved that he deserved his share of it by taking it exactly as she meant it, and saying heartily,—

"I like that, Christie, and wish more women thought and spoke as you do."

"If they had had my experience they would, and not be ashamed of it. I am so old now I can say these things and not be misjudged; for even some sensible people think this honest sort of fellowship impossible if not improper. I don't, and I never shall, so if I can ever do anything for you, David, forget that I am a woman, and tell me as freely as if I were a younger brother."

"I wish you were!"

"So do I; you'd make a splendid elder brother."

"No, a very bad one."

There was a sudden sharpness in David's voice that jarred on Christie's ear, and made her look up quickly. She only caught a glimpse of his face, and saw that it was strangely troubled, as he swung himself over

the wall with little Vic on his arm, and went towards the house, saying abruptly,—

"Baby's sleepy: she must go in."

Christie sat some time longer, wondering what she had said to disturb him, and when the bell rang went in still perplexed. But David looked as usual, and the only trace of disquiet was an occasional hasty shaking back of the troublesome lock, and a slight knitting of the brows; two tokens, as she had learned to know, of impatience or pain.

She was soon so absorbed in feeding the children, hungry and clamorous as young birds for their food, that she forgot everything else. When dinner was done and cleared away, she devoted herself to Mrs. Wilkins for an hour or two, while Mrs. Sterling took her nap, the infants played riotously in the lane, and David was busy with orders.

The arrival of Mr. Power drew every one to the porch to welcome him. As he handed Christie a book, he asked, with a significant smile,—

"Have you found him yet?"

She glanced at the title of the new gift,

read "Heroes and Hero-worship," and answered merrily,—

"No, sir, but I'm looking hard."

"Success to your search," and Mr. Power turned to greet David, who approached.

"Now, what shall we play?" asked Christie, as the children gathered about her, demanding to be amused.

George Washington suggested leap-frog, and the others added equally impracticable requests; but Mrs. Wilkins settled the matter by saying,—

"Let's have some play-actin', Christie. That used to tickle the children amazin'ly, and I was never tired of hearin' them pieces, specially the solemn ones."

"Yes, yes; do the funny girl with the baby, and the old woman, and the lady that took pison and had fits!" shouted the children, charmed with the idea.

Christie felt ready for anything just then, and gave them Tilly Slowboy, Miss Miggs, and Mrs. Gummage, in her best style, while the young folks rolled on the grass in ecstasies, and Mrs. Wilkins laughed till she cried.

"Now a touch of tragedy!" said Mr. Power, who sat under the elm, with David leaning on the back of his chair, both applauding heartily.

"You insatiable people! do you expect me to give you low comedy and heavy tragedy all alone? I'm equal to melodrama I think, and I'll give you Miss St. Clair as Juliet, if you wait a moment."

Christie stepped into the house, and soon reappeared with a white table-cloth draped about her, two dishevelled locks of hair on her shoulders, and the vinegar cruet in her hand, that being the first bottle she could find. She meant to burlesque the poison scene, and began in the usual ranting way; but she soon forgot St. Clair in poor Juliet, and did it as she had often longed to do it, with all the power and passion she possessed. Very faulty was her rendering, but the earnestness she put into it made it most effective to her uncritical audience, who "brought down the house," when she fell upon the grass with her best stage drop, and lay there getting her breath after the mouthful of vinegar

she had taken in the excitement of the moment.

She was up again directly, and, inspired by this superb success, ran in and presently reappeared as Lady Macbeth, with Mrs. Wilkins's scarlet shawl for royal robes, and the leafy chaplet of the morning for a crown. She took the stage with some difficulty, for the unevenness of the turf impaired the majesty of her tragic stride, and, fixing her eyes on an invisible Thane (who cut his part shamefully, and spoke in the gruffest of gruff voices), she gave them the dagger scene.

David, as the orchestra, had been performing a drum solo on the back of a chair with two of the corn-cobs Victoria had been building houses with; but when Lady Macbeth said, "Give *me* the daggers," Christie plucked the cobs suddenly from his hands, looking so fiercely scornful, and louring upon him so wrathfully with her corked brows, that he ejaculated an involuntary, "Bless me!" as he stepped back quite daunted.

Being in the spirit of her part, Christie closed with the sleep-walking scene, using the

table-cloth again, while a towel composed the tragic nightcap of her ladyship. This was an imitation, and, having a fine model and being a good mimic, she did well; for the children sat staring with round eyes, the gentlemen watched the woful face and gestures intently, and Mrs. Wilkins took a long breath at the end, exclaiming, "I never did see the beat of that for ghastliness! My sister Clarissy used to walk in her sleep, but she warn't half so kind of dreadful."

"If she had had the murder of a few friends on her conscience, I dare say she would have been," said Christie, going in to make herself tidy.

"Well, how do you like her as an actress?" asked Mr. Power of David, who stood looking, as if he still saw and heard the haunted lady.

"Very much; but better as a woman. I'd no idea she had it in her," answered David, in a wonder-stricken tone.

"Plenty of tragedy and comedy in all of us," began Mr. Power; but David said hastily,—

"Yes, but few of us have passion and imagination enough to act Shakspeare in that way."

"Very true: Christie herself could not give a whole character in that style, and would not think of trying."

"*I* think she could; and I'd like to see her try it," said David, much impressed by the dramatic ability which Christie's usual quietude had most effectually hidden.

He was still thinking about it, when she came out again. Mr. Power beckoned to her, saying, as she came and stood before him, flushed and kindled with her efforts,—

"Now, you must give me a bit from the 'Merchant of Venice.' Portia is a favourite character of mine, and I want to see if you can do anything with it."

"No, sir, I cannot. I used to study it, but it was too sober to suit me. I am not a judicial woman, so I gave it up," answered Christie, much flattered by his request, and amused at the respectful way in which David looked at her. Then, as if it just occurred to her, she added, "I remember one little speech

that I can say to *you*, sir, with great truth, and I will, since you like that play."

Still standing before him, she bent her head a little, and with a graceful gesture of the hands, as if offering something, she delivered with heartfelt emphasis the first part of Portia's pretty speech to her fortunate suitor,—

"You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am: though for myself alone
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better; yet for you
I would be trebled twenty times myself;
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich;
That, only to stand high in your account,
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account: but the full sum of me
Is sum of nothing; which, to term in gross,
Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised,
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, in that her willing spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king."

David applauded vigorously; but Mr. Power rose silently, looking both touched and surprised; and, drawing Christie's hand through his arm, led her away into the

garden for one of the quiet talks that were so much to her.

When they returned, the Wilkinses were preparing to depart; and, after repeated leave-takings, finally got under weigh, were packed into the omnibus, and rumbled off with hats, hands, and handkerchiefs waving from every window. Mr. Power soon followed, and peace returned to the little house in the lane.

Later in the evening, when Mrs. Sterling was engaged with a neighbour, who had come to confide some affliction to the good lady, Christie went into the porch, and found David sitting on the step, enjoying the mellow moonlight and the balmy air. As he did not speak, she sat down silently, folded her hands in her lap, and began to enjoy the beauty of the night in her own way. Presently she became conscious that David's eyes had turned from the moon to her own face. He sat in the shade, she in the light, and he was looking at her with the new expression which amused her.

"Well, what is it? You look as if

you never saw me before," she said, smiling.

"I feel as if I never had," he answered, still regarding her as if she had been a picture.

"What do I look like?"

"A peaceful, pious nun, just now."

"Oh! that is owing to my pretty shawl. I put it on in honour of the day, though it is a trifle warm, I confess." And Christie stroked the soft folds about her shoulders, and settled the corner that lay lightly on her hair. "I do feel peaceful to-night, but not pious. I am afraid I never shall do that," she added soberly.

"Why not?"

"Well, it does not seem to be my nature, and I don't know how to change it. I want something to keep me steady, but I can't find it. So I whiffle about this way and that, and sometimes think I am a most degenerate creature."

"That is only human nature, so don't be troubled. We are all compasses pointing due north. We get shaken often, and the needle

varies in spite of us; but the minute we are quiet, it points right, and we have only to follow it."

"The keeping quiet is just what I cannot do. Your mother shows me how lovely it is, and I try to imitate it; but this restless soul of mine will ask questions, and doubt and fear, and worry me in many ways. What shall I do to keep it still?" asked Christie, smiling, yet earnest.

"Let it alone: you cannot force these things, and the best way is to wait till the attraction is strong enough to keep the needle steady. Some people get their ballast slowly, some don't need much, and some have to work hard for theirs.

"Did you?" asked Christie; for David's voice fell a little, as he uttered the last words.

"I have not got much yet."

"I think you have. Why, David, you are always cheerful and contented, good and generous. If that is not true piety, what is?"

"You are very much deceived, and I am sorry for it," said David, with the impatient gesture of the head, and a troubled look.

"Prove it!" And Christie looked at him with such sincere respect and regard, that his honest nature would not let him accept it, though it gratified him much.

He made no answer for a minute. Then he said slowly, as if feeling a modest man's hesitation to speak of himself, yet urged to it by some irresistible impulse,—

"I *will* prove it if you won't mind the unavoidable egotism; for I cannot let you think me so much better than I am. Outwardly I seem to you 'cheerful, contented, generous, and good.' In reality I am sad, dissatisfied, bad, and selfish: see if I'm not. I often tire of this quiet life, hate my work, and long to break away, and follow my own wild and wilful impulses, no matter where they lead. Nothing keeps me at such times but my mother and God's patience."

David began quietly; but the latter part of this confession was made with a sudden impetuosity that startled Christie, so utterly unlike his usual self-control was it. She could only look at him with the surprise she felt. His face was in the shadow; but she

saw that it was flushed, his eyes excited, and in his voice she heard an undertone that made it sternly self-accusing.

"I am not a hypocrite," he went on rapidly, as if driven to speak in spite of himself. "I try to be what I seem, but it is too hard sometimes, and I despair. Especially hard is it to feel that I have learned to feign happiness so well that others are entirely deceived. Mr. Power and mother know me as I am: other friends I have not, unless you will let me call you one. Whether you do or not after this, I respect you too much to let you delude yourself about my virtues, so I tell you the truth and abide the consequences."

He looked up at her as he paused, with a curious mixture of pride and humility in his face, and squared his broad shoulders as if he had thrown off a burden that had much oppressed him.

Christie offered him her hand, saying in a tone that did his heart good: "The consequences are that I respect, admire, and trust you more than ever, and feel proud to be your friend."

David gave the hand a strong and grateful pressure, said "Thank you," in a moved tone, and then leaned back into the shadow, as if trying to recover from this unusual burst of confidence, won from him by the soft magic of time, place, and companionship.

Fearing he would regret the glimpse he had given her, and anxious to show how much she liked it, Christie talked on to give him time to regain composure.

"I always thought in reading the lives of saints or good men of any time that their struggles were the most interesting and helpful things recorded. Human imperfection only seems to make real piety more possible, and to me more beautiful; for where others have conquered I can conquer, having suffered as they suffer, and seen their hard-won success. That is the sort of religion I want; something to hold by, live in, and enjoy, if I can only get it."

"I know you will." He said it heartily, and seemed quite calm again; so Christie obeyed the instinct which told her that questions would be good for David, and

that he was in the mood for answering them.

"May I ask you something," she began, a little timidly.

"Anything, Christie," he answered instantly.

"That is a rash promise: I am a woman, and therefore curious; what shall you do if I take advantage of the privilege?"

"Try and see."

"I will be discreet, and only ask one thing," she replied, charmed with her success. "You said just now that you had learned to feign happiness. I wish you would tell me how you do it, for it is such an excellent imitation I shall be quite content with it till I can learn the genuine thing."

David fingered the troublesome forelock thoughtfully for a moment, then said, with something of the former impetuosity coming back into his voice and manner,—

"I will tell you all about it; that's the best way: I know I shall some day because I can't help it; so I may as well have done with it now, since I have begun. It is not interest-

ing, mind you—only a grim little history of one man's fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil: will you have it?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Christie, so eagerly that David laughed, in spite of the bitter memories stirring at his heart.

"So like a woman, always ready to hear and forgive sinners," he said, then took a long breath, and added rapidly,—

"I'll put it in as few words as possible, and much good may it do you. Some years ago I was desperately miserable—never mind why: I dare say I shall tell you all about it some day if I go on at this rate. Well, being miserable, as I say, everything looked black and bad to me: I hated all men, distrusted all women, doubted the existence of God, and was a forlorn wretch generally. Why I did not go to the devil, I can't say: I did start once or twice; but the thought of that dear old woman in there sitting all alone and waiting for me dragged me back, and kept me here till the first recklessness was over. People talk about duty being sweet; I have not found it so, but there it was: I should

have been a brute to shirk it; so I took it up, and held on desperately till it grew bearable."

"It *has* grown sweet now, David, I am sure," said Christie, very low.

"No, not yet," he answered, with the stern honesty that would not let him deceive himself or others, cost what it might to be true. "There is a certain solid satisfaction in it that I did not use to find. It is not a mere dogged persistence now, as it once was, and that is a step towards loving it perhaps."

He spoke half to himself, and sat leaning his head on both hands propped on his knees, looking down as if the weight of the old trouble bent his shoulders again.

"What more, David?" said Christie.

"Only this. When I found I had got to live, and live manfully, I said to myself, 'I must have help or I cannot do it.' To no living soul could I tell my grief, not even to my mother, for she had her own to bear: no human being could help me, yet I *must* have help or give up shamefully. Then I did what others do when all else fails to sustain them; I turned to God: not humbly, not devoutly

or trustfully, but doubtfully, bitterly, and rebelliously; for I said in my despairing heart, 'If there *is* a God, let Him help me, and I will believe.' He did help me, and I kept my word."

"Oh, David, how?" whispered Christie, after a moment's silence, for the last words were solemn in their earnestness.

"The help did not come at once. No miracle answered me, and I thought my cry had not been heard. But it had, and slowly something like submission came to me. It was not cheerful nor pious: it was only a dumb sad sort of patience, without hope or faith. It was better than desperation; so I accepted it, and bore the inevitable as well as I could. Presently, courage seemed to spring up again: I was ashamed to be beaten in the first battle, and some sort of blind instinct made me long to break away from the past and begin again. My father was dead; mother left all to me, and followed where I led. I sold the old place, bought this, and, shutting out the world as much as I could, I fell to work as if my life depended on it.

That was five or six years ago: and for a long time I delved away without interest or pleasure, merely as a safety-valve for my energies, and a means of living; for I gave up all my earlier hopes and plans when the trouble came.

"I did not love my work; but it was good for me, and helped cure my sick soul. I never guessed why I felt better, but dug on with indifference first, then felt pride in my garden, then interest in the plants I tended, and by-and-by I saw what they had done for me, and loved them like true friends."

A broad woodbine leaf had been fluttering against David's head, as he leaned on the slender pillar of the porch where it grew. Now, as if involuntarily, he laid his cheek against it with a caressing gesture, and sat looking over the garden lying dewy and still in the moonlight, with the grateful look of a man who has learned the healing miracles of Nature, and how near she is to God.

"Mr. Power helped you, didn't he?" said Christie, longing to hear more.

"So much! I never can tell you what he

was to me, nor how I thank him. To him, and to my work, I owe the little I have won in the way of strength and comfort after years of effort. I see now the compensation that comes out of trouble, the lovely possibilities that exist for all of us, and the infinite patience of God, which is to me one of the greatest of His divine attributes. I have only got so far, but things grow easier as one goes on; and if I keep tugging I may yet *be* the cheerful, contented man I seem. That is all, Christie, and a longer story than I meant to tell."

"Not long enough: some time you will tell me more perhaps, since you have once begun. It seems quite natural now, and I am so pleased and honoured by your confidence. But I cannot help wondering what made you do it all at once," said Christie presently, after they had listened to a whippoorwill, and watched the flight of a downy owl.

"I do not think I quite know myself, unless it was because I have been on my good behaviour since you came, and, being a humbug, as I tell you, was forced to unmask in

spite of myself. There are limits to human endurance, and the proudest man longs to unpack his woes before a sympathizing friend now and then. I have been longing to do this for some time; but I never like to disturb mother's peace, or take Mr. Power from those who need him more. So to-day, when you so sweetly offered to help me if you could, it quite went to my heart, and seemed so friendly and comfortable, I could not resist trying it to-night, when you began about my imaginary virtues. That is the truth, I believe: now, what shall we do about it?"

"Just go on, and do it again whenever you feel like it. I know what loneliness is, and how telling worries often cures them. I meant every word I said this morning, and will prove it by doing anything in the world I can for you. Believe this, and let me be your friend."

They had risen, as a stir within told them the guest was going; and as Christie spoke she was looking up with the moonlight full upon her face.

If there had been any hidden purpose in her mind, any false sentiment, or trace of coquetry in her manner, it would have spoiled that hearty little speech of hers.

But in her heart was nothing but a sincere desire to prove gratitude and offer sympathy, in her manner the gentle frankness of a woman speaking to a brother, and in her face the earnestness of one who felt the value of friendship, and did not ask or give it lightly.

"I will," was David's emphatic answer, and then, as if to seal the bargain, he stooped down, and gravely kissed her on the forehead.

Christie was a little startled, but neither offended nor confused; for there was no love in that quiet kiss,—only respect, affection, and much gratitude; an involuntary demonstration from the lonely man to the true-hearted woman who had dared to come and comfort him.

Out trotted neighbour Miller, and that was the end of confidences in the porch; but David played melodiously on his flute that

night, and Christie fell asleep, saying happily to herself,—

"Now we are all right, friends for ever, and everything will go beautifully."

## CHAPTER IV.

### WAKING UP.

EVERYTHING *did* "go beautifully" for a time; so much so, that Christie began to think she really *had* "got religion." A delightful peace pervaded her soul, a new interest made the dullest task agreeable, and life grew so inexpressibly sweet that she felt as if she could forgive all her enemies, love her friends more than ever, and do anything great, good, or glorious.

She had known such moods before, but they had never lasted long, and were not so intense as this; therefore, she was sure some blessed power had come to uphold and cheer her. She sang like a lark as she swept and dusted; thought high and happy thoughts among the pots and kettles, and, when she

sat sewing, smiled unconsciously as if some deep satisfaction made sunshine from within. Heart and soul seemed to wake up and rejoice as naturally and beautifully as flowers in the spring. A soft brightness shone in her eyes, a fuller tone sounded in her voice, and her face grew young and blooming with the happiness that transfigures all it touches.

"Christie's growing handsome," David would say to his mother, as if she was a flower in which he took pride.

"Thee is a good gardener, Davy," the old lady would reply, and when he was busy would watch him with a tender sort of anxiety, as if to discover a like change in him.

But no alteration appeared, except more cheerfulness and less silence; for now there was no need to hide his real self, and all the social virtues in him came out delightfully after their long solitude.

In her present uplifted state, Christie could no more help regarding David as a martyr and admiring him for it, than she could help mixing sentiment with her sympathy. By the light of the late confessions, his life and

character looked very different to her now. His apparent contentment was resignation; his cheerfulness, a manly contempt for complaint; his reserve, the modest reticence of one who, having done a hard duty well, desires no praise for it. Like all enthusiastic persons, Christie had a hearty admiration for self-sacrifice and self-control; and while she learned to see David's virtues, she also exaggerated them, and could not do enough to show the daily increasing esteem and respect she felt for him, and to atone for the injustice she once did him.

She grubbed in the garden and greenhouse, and learned hard botanical names that she might be able to talk intelligently upon subjects that interested her comrade. Then, as autumn ended out-of-door work, she tried to make home more comfortable and attractive than ever.

David's room was her especial care; for now to her there was something pathetic in the place and its poor furnishing. He had fought many a silent battle there, won many a secret victory, and tried to cheer his soli-

tude with the best thoughts the minds of the bravest, wisest men could give him.

She did not smile at the dilapidated idols now, but touched them tenderly, and let no dust obscure their well-beloved faces. She set the books in order daily, taking many a sip of refreshment from them by the way, and respectfully regarded those in unknown tongues, full of admiration for David's learning. She covered the irruptive sofa neatly; saw that the little vase was always clear and freshly filled; cared for the nursery in the gable-window; and preserved an exquisite neatness everywhere, which delighted the soul of the room's order-loving occupant.

She also—alas, for romance!—cooked the dishes David loved, and liked to see him enjoy them with the appetite which once had shocked her so. She watched over his buttons with a vigilance that would have softened the heart of the crustiest bachelor: she even gave herself the complexion of a lemon by wearing blue, because David liked the pretty contrast with his mother's drabs.

After recording that last fact, it is unne-

cessary to explain what was the matter with Christie. She honestly thought she had got religion; but it was piety's twin-sister who produced this wonderful revival in her soul; and though she began in all good faith, she presently discovered that she was

> "Not the first maiden
> Who came but for friendship,
> And took away love."

After the birthnight confessions, David found it easier to go on with the humdrum life he had chosen from a sense of duty; for now he felt as if he had not only a fellow-worker, but a comrade and friend who understood, sympathized with, and encouraged him by an interest and good-will inexpressibly comfortable and inspiring. Nothing disturbed the charm of the new league in those early days; for Christie was thoroughly simple and sincere, and did her womanly work with no thought of reward or love or admiration.

David saw this, and felt it more attractive than any gift of beauty or fascination of manner would have been. He had no desire

to be a lover, having forbidden himself that hope; but he found it so easy and pleasant to be a friend that he reproached himself for not trying it before; and explained his neglect by the fact that Christie was not an ordinary woman, since none of all the many he had known and helped, had ever been anything to him but objects of pity and protection.

Mrs. Sterling saw these changes with her wise, motherly eyes, but said nothing; for she influenced others by the silent power of character. Speaking little, and unusually gifted with the meditative habits of age, she seemed to live in a more peaceful world than this. As George MacDonald somewhere says, "Her soul seemed to sit apart in a sunny little room, safe from dust and noise, serenely regarding passers-by through the clear muslin curtains of her window."

Yet she was neither cold nor careless, stern nor selfish, but ready to share all the joys and sorrows of those about her; and when advice was asked she gave it gladly. Christie had won her heart long ago, and now was

as devoted as a daughter to her; lightening her cares so skilfully that many of them slipped naturally on to the young shoulders, and left the old lady much time for rest, or the lighter tasks fitted for feeble hands. Christie often called her "Mother," and felt herself rewarded for the hardest, humblest job she ever did, when the sweet old voice said gratefully, "I thank thee, daughter."

Things were in this prosperous, not to say paradisiacal state, when one member of the family began to make discoveries of an alarming nature. The first was that the Sunday pilgrimages to church were seasons of great refreshment to soul and body when David went also, and utter failures if he did not. Next, that the restless ambitions of all sorts were quite gone; for now Christie's mission seemed to be sitting in a quiet corner and making shirts in the most exquisite manner, while thinking about—well, say botany, or any kindred subject. Thirdly, that home was woman's sphere after all, and the perfect roasting of beef, brewing of tea, and concocting of delectable puddings, an end worth

living for if masculine commendation rewarded the labour.

Fourthly, and worst of all, she discovered that she was not satisfied with half confidences, and quite pined to know all about "David's trouble." The little needle-book with the faded "Letty" on it haunted her; and when, after a pleasant evening below, she heard him pace his room for hours, or play melancholy airs upon the flute, she was jealous of that unknown woman who had such power to disturb his peace, and felt a strong desire to smash the musical confidante into whose responsive breast he poured his woe.

At this point Christie paused; and, after evading any explanation of these phenomena in the most skilful manner for a time, suddenly faced the fact, saying to herself with great candour and decision,—

"I know what all this means: I'm beginning to like David more than is good for me. I see this clearly, and won't dodge any longer, but put a stop to it at once. Of course I can if I choose, and now is the time to do

it; for I understand myself perfectly, and if I reach a certain point it is all over with me. That point I will *not* reach: David's heart is in that Letty's grave, and he only cares for me as a friend. I promised to be one to him, and I'll keep my word like an honest woman. It may not be easy; but all the sacrifices shall not be his, and I won't be a fool."

With praiseworthy resolution Christie set about the reformation without delay; not an easy task, and one that taxed all her wit and wisdom to execute without betraying the motive for it. She decided that Mrs. Sterling must not be left alone on Sunday, so the young people took turns to go to church, and such dismal trips Christie had never known; for all her Sundays were bad weather, and Mr. Power seemed to hit on unusually uninteresting texts.

She talked while she sewed instead of indulging in dangerous thoughts, and Mrs. Sterling was surprised and entertained by this new loquacity. In the evening she read and studied with a diligence that amazed and rather disgusted David;

since she kept all her lively chat for his mother, and poured over her books when he wanted her for other things.

"I'm trying to brighten up my wits," she said, and went on trying to stifle her affections.

But though "the absurdity," as she called the new revelation, was stopped externally, it continued with redoubled vigour internally. Each night she said, "this *must* be conquered," yet each morning it rose fair and strong to make the light and beauty of her day, and conquer her again. She did her best and bravest, but was forced at last to own that she could not "put a stop to it," because she had already reached the point where "it was all over with her."

Just at this critical moment an event occurred which completed Christie's defeat, and made her feel that her only safety lay in flight.

One evening she sat studying ferns, and heroically saying over and over, "Andiantum, Aspidium, and Asplenium Trichomanes," while longing to go and talk delightfully to David, who sat musing by the fire.

"I can't go on so much longer," she thought despairingly. "'Polypodium aureum, a native of Florida,' is all very interesting in its place; but it doesn't help me to gain self-control a bit, and I shall disgrace myself if something doesn't happen very soon."

Something did happen almost instantly, for as she shut the cover sharply on the poor Polypods, a knock was heard, and before David could answer it the door flew open and a girl ran in. Straight to him she went, and clinging to his arm said excitedly,—

"Oh, do take care of me: I've run away again!"

"Why, Kitty, what's the matter now?" asked David, putting back her hood, and looking down at her with the paternal expression Christie had not seen for a long time, and missed very much.

"Father found me, and took me home, and wanted me to marry a dreadful man, and I wouldn't, so I ran away to you. He didn't know I came here before, and I'm safe if you'll let me stay," cried Kitty, still clinging and imploring.

"Of course I will, and glad to see you back

again," answered David, adding pitifully, as he put her in his easy-chair, took her cloak and hood off, and stood stroking her curly hair, "Poor little girl! it is hard to have to run away so much, isn't it?"

"Not if I come here; it's so pleasant, I'd like to stay all my life," and Kitty took a long breath, as if her troubles were over now. "Who's that?" she asked suddenly, as her eye fell on Christie, who sat watching her with interest.

"That is our good friend Miss Devon. She came to take your place, and we got so fond of her we could not let her go," answered David, with a gesture of introduction, quite unconscious that his position just then was about as safe and pleasant as that of a man between a lighted candle and an open powder-barrel.

The two young women nodded to each other, took a swift survey, and made up their minds before David had poked the fire. Christie saw a pretty face with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and brown rings of hair lying on the smooth, low forehead; a young face, but not child-

like, for it was conscious of its own prettiness, and betrayed the fact by little airs and graces that reminded one of a coquettish kitten. Short and slender, she looked more youthful than she was; while a gay dress, with gilt earrings, locket at the throat, and a cherry ribbon in her hair, made her a bright little figure in that plain room.

Christie suddenly felt as if ten years had been added to her age, as she eyed the newcomer, who leaned back in the great chair talking to David, who stood on the rug, evidently finding it pleasanter to look at the vivacious face before him than at the fire.

"Just the pretty, lively sort of girl sensible men often marry, and then discover how silly they are," thought Christie, taking up her work and assuming an indifferent air.

"She's a lady and nice-looking, but I know I shan't like her," was Kitty's decision, as she turned away and devoted herself to David, hoping he would perceive how much she had improved and admire her accordingly.

"So you don't want to marry this Miles

because he is not handsome. You'd better think again before you make up your mind. He is respectable, well off, and fond of you, it seems. Why not try it, Kitty? You need some one to take care of you sadly," David said, when her story had been told.

"If father plagues me much I may take the man; but I'd rather have the other one if he wasn't poor," answered Kitty, with a sidelong glance of the blue eyes, and a conscious smile on the red lips.

"Oh, there's another lover, is there?"

"Lots of 'em."

David laughed and looked at Christie as if inviting her to be amused with the freaks and prattle of a child. But Christie sewed away without a sign of interest.

"That won't do, Kitty: you are too young for much of such nonsense. I shall keep you here awhile, and see if we can't settle matters both wisely and pleasantly," he said, shaking his head as sagely as a grandfather.

"I'm sure I wish you would: I love to stay here, you are always so good to me. I'm

in no hurry to be married; and you won't make me, will you?"

Kitty rose as she spoke, and stood before him with a beseeching little gesture, and a confiding air quite captivating to behold.

Christie was suddenly seized with a strong desire to shake the girl, and call her an "artful little hussy," but crushed this unaccountable impulse, and hemmed a pocket-handkerchief with reckless rapidity, while she stole covert glances at the tableau by the fire.

David put his finger under Kitty's round chin, and lifting her face, looked into it, trying to discover if she really cared for this suitor who seemed so providentially provided for her. Kitty smiled and blushed, and dimpled under that grave look so prettily that it soon changed, and David let her go, saying indulgently,—

"You shall not be troubled, for you are only a child after all. Let the lovers go, and stay and play with me, for I've been rather lonely lately."

"That's a reproach for me," thought Christie, longing to cry out, "No, no; send

the girl away and let *me* be all in all to you." But she only turned up the lamp and pretended to be looking for a spool, while her heart ached, and her eyes were too dim for seeing.

"I'm too old to play, but I'll stay and tease you as I used to, if Miles don't come and carry me off as he said he would," answered Kitty, with a toss of the head which showed she was not so childlike as David fancied. But the next minute she was sitting on a stool at his feet petting the cat, while she told her adventures with girlish volubility.

Christie could not bear to sit and look on any longer, so she left the room, saying she would see if Mrs. Sterling wanted anything, for the old lady kept her room with a touch of rheumatism. As she shut the door, Christie heard Kitty say softly,—

"Now we'll be comfortable as we used to be, won't we?"

What David answered Christie did not stay to hear, but went into the kitchen, and had her first pang of jealousy out alone, while

she beat up the buckwheats for breakfast with an energy that made them miracles of lightness on the morrow.

When she told Mrs. Sterling of the new arrival, the placid little lady gave a cluck of regret, and said with unusual emphasis,—

"I'm sorry for it."

"Why?" asked Christie, feeling as if she could embrace the speaker for the words.

"She is a giddy little thing, and much care to whoever befriends her." Mrs. Sterling would say no more, but, as Christie bade her good-night, she held her hand, saying with a kiss,—

"No one will take thy place with *me*, my daughter."

For a week Christie suffered constant pinpricks of jealousy, despising herself all the time, and trying to be friendly with the disturber of her peace. As if prompted by an evil spirit, Kitty unconsciously tried and tormented her from morning to night, and no one saw or guessed it, unless Mrs. Sterling's motherly heart divined the truth. David seemed to enjoy the girl's lively chat, her

openly expressed affection, and the fresh young face that always brightened when he came.

Presently, however, Christie saw a change in him, and suspected that he had discovered that Kitty was a child no longer, but a young girl with her head full of love and lovers. The blue eyes grew shy, the pretty face grew eloquent with blushes now and then, as he looked at it, and the lively tongue faltered sometimes in speaking to him. A thousand little coquetries were played off for his benefit, and frequent appeals for advice in her heart affairs kept tender subjects uppermost in their conversations.

At first all this seemed to amuse David as much as if Kitty were a small child playing at sweethearts; but soon his manner changed, growing respectful, and a little cool when Kitty was most confiding. He no longer laughed about Miles, stopped calling her "little girl," and dropped his paternal ways, as he had done with Christie. By many indescribable but significant signs he showed that he considered Kitty a woman now, and

treated her as such, being all the more scrupulous in the respect he paid her, because she was so unprotected, and so wanting in the natural dignity and refinement which are a woman's best protection.

Christie admired him for this, but saw in it the beginning of a tenderer feeling than pity, and felt each day that she was one too many now.

Kitty was puzzled and piqued by these changes, and, being a born flirt, tried all her powers on David, veiled under guileless girlishness. She was very pretty, very charming, and at times most lovable and sweet when all that was best in her shallow little heart was touched. But it was evident to all that her early acquaintance with the hard and sordid side of life had brushed the bloom from her nature, and filled her mind with thoughts and feelings unfitted to her years.

Mrs. Sterling was very kind to her, but never treated her as she did Christie; and though not a word was spoken between them, the elder women knew that they quite agreed in their opinion of Kitty. She evi-

dently was rather afraid of the old lady, who said so little and saw so much. Christie also she shunned without appearing to do so, and, when alone with her, put on airs that half amused, half irritated the other.

"David is my friend, and I don't care for any one else," her manner said as plainly as words; and to him she devoted herself so entirely, and apparently so successfully, that Christie made up her mind, he had at last begun to forget his Letty, and think of filling the void her loss had left.

A few words which she accidently overheard confirmed this idèa, and showed her what she must do. As she came quietly in one evening from a stroll in the lane, and stood taking off cloak and hood, she caught a glimpse through the half-open parlour-door, of David pacing to and fro with a curiously excited expression on his face, and heard Mrs. Sterling say with unusual warmth,—

"Thee is too hard upon thyself, Davy. Forget the past and be happy as other men are. Thee has atoned for thy fault long ago, so let me see thee at peace before I die, my son."

"Not yet, mother, not yet. I have no right to hope or ask for any woman's love till I am worthier of it," answered David, in a tone that thrilled Christie's heart, it was so full of love and longing.

Here Kitty came running in from the green-house with her hands full of flowers, and, passing Christie, who was fumbling among the cloaks in the passage, she went to show David some new blossom.

He had no time to alter the expression of his face for its usual grave serenity: Kitty saw the change at once, and spoke of it with her accustomed want of tact.

"How handsome you look! What *are* you thinking about?" she said, gazing up at him with her own eyes bright with wonder, and her cheeks glowing with the delicate carmine of the frosty air.

"I am thinking that you look more like a rose than ever," answered David, turning her attention from himself by a compliment, and beginning to admire the flowers, still with that flushed and kindled look on his own face.

Christie crept up-stairs, and, sitting in the dark, decided, with the firmness of despair, to go away, lest she should betray the secret that possessed her, a dead hope now, but still too dear to be concealed.

"Mr. Power told me to come to him when I got tired of this. I'll say I *am* tired and try something else, no matter what: I can bear anything but to stand quietly by and see David marry that empty-hearted girl, who dares to show that she desires to win him. Out of sight of all this, I can conquer my love, or at least hide it; but if I stay I know I shall betray myself in some bitter minute, and I'd rather die than do that."

Armed with this resolution, Christie went the next day to Mr. Power, and simply said, "I am not needed at the Sterlings any more: can you give me other work to do?"

Mr. Power's keen eye searched her face for a moment, as if to discover the real motive for her wish. But Christie had nerved herself to bear that look, and showed no sign of her real trouble, unless the set expression of her lips, and the unnatural steadiness of

her eyes betrayed it to that experienced reader of human hearts.

Whatever he suspected or saw, Mr. Power kept to himself, and answered in his cordial way,—

"Well, I've been expecting you would tire of that quiet life, and have plenty of work ready for you. One of my good Dorcases is tired out and must rest; so you shall take her place and visit my poor, report their needs, and supply them as fast as we can. Does that suit you?"

"Entirely, sir. Where shall I live?" asked Christie, with an expression of relief that said much.

"Here for the present. I want a secretary to put my papers in order, write some of my letters, and do a thousand things to help a busy man. My old housekeeper likes you, and will let you take a duster now and then, if you don't find enough other work to do. When can you come?"

Christie answered, with a long breath of satisfaction, "To-morrow, if you like."

"I do: can you be spared so soon?"

"Oh, yes; they don't want me now at all, or I would not leave them. Kitty can take my place: she needs protection more than I; and there is not room for two." She checked herself there, conscious that a tone of bitterness had crept into her voice. Then quite steadily she added,—

"Will you be kind enough to write, and ask Mrs. Sterling if she can spare me? I shall find it hard to tell her myself, for I fear she may think me ungrateful after all her kindness."

"No: she is used to parting with those whom she has helped, and is always glad to set them on their way towards better things. I will write to-morrow, and you can come whenever you will, sure of a welcome, my child."

Something in the tone of those last words, and the pressure of the strong, kind hand, touched Christie's sore heart, and made it impossible for her to hide the truth entirely.

She only said, "Thank you, sir, I shall be very glad to come;" but her eyes were full,

and she held his hand an instant, as if she clung to it, sure of succour and support.

Then she went home so pale and quiet, so helpful, patient, and affectionate, that Mrs. Sterling watched her anxiously, David looked amazed, and even self-absorbed Kitty saw the change, and was touched by it.

On the morrow Mr. Power's note came, and Christie fled up-stairs while it was read and discussed.

"If I get through this parting without disgracing myself, I don't care what happens to me afterwards," she said; and, in order that she might do so, she assumed a cheerful air, and determined to depart with all the honours of war, if she died in the attempt.

So, when Mrs. Sterling called her down, she went humming into the parlour, smiled as she read the note silently given her, and then said, with an effort greater than any she had ever made in her most arduous part on the stage,—

"Yes, I did say to Mr. Power that I thought I'd better be moving on. I'm a restless creature, as you know; and now that you

don't need me, I've a fancy to see more of the world. If you want me back again in the spring, I'll come."

"I *shall* want thee, my dear, but will not say a word to keep thee now, for thee does need a change, and Mr. Power can give thee work better suited to thy taste than any here. We shall see thee sometimes, and spring will make thee long for the flowers, I hope," was Mrs. Sterling's answer, as Christie gave back the note at the end of her difficult speech.

"Don't think me ungrateful. I have been very happy here, and never shall forget how motherly kind you have been to me. You will believe this and love me still, though I go away and leave you for a little while?" prayed Christie, with a face full of treacherous emotion.

Mrs. Sterling laid her hand on Christie's head, as she knelt down impulsively before her, and with a soft solemnity that made the words both an assurance and a blessing, she said,—

"I believe and love and honour thee, my child. My heart warmed to thee from the

first; it has taken thee to itself now; and nothing can ever come between us, unless thee wills it. Remember that, and go in peace with an old friend's thanks and good wishes in return for faithful service, which no money can repay."

Christie laid her cheek against that wrinkled one, and for a moment was held close to that peaceful old heart which felt so tenderly for her, yet never wounded her by a word of pity. Infinitely comforting was that little instant of time, when the venerable woman consoled the young one with a touch, and strengthened her by the mute eloquence of sympathy.

This made the hardest task of all easier to perform; and when David met her in the evening, Christie was ready to play out her part, feeling that Mrs. Sterling would help her if need be. But David took it very quietly; at least he showed no very poignant regret at her departure, though he lamented it, and hoped it would not be a very long absence. This wounded Christie terribly; for all of a sudden a barrier seemed to rise between them, and the old friendliness grew chilled.

"He thinks I am ungrateful, and is offended," she said to herself. "Well, I can bear coldness better than kindness now, and it will make it easier to go."

Kitty was pleased at the prospect of reigning alone, and did not disguise her satisfaction; so Christie's last day was anything but pleasant. Mr. Power would send for her on the morrow, and she busied herself in packing her own possessions, setting everything in order, and making various little arrangements for Mrs. Sterling's comfort, as Kitty was a heedless creature, willing enough, but very forgetful. In the evening some neighbours came in, so that dangerous time was safely passed, and Christie escaped to her own room with her usual quiet "good-night" all round.

"We won't have any sentimental demonstrations; no wailing or tender adieux. If I'm weak enough to break my heart, no one need know it,—least of all that little fool," thought Christie grimly, as she burnt up several long-cherished relics of her love.

She was up early, and went about her usual work with the sad pleasure with which one

performs a task for the last time. Lazy little Kitty never appeared till the bell rang; and Christie was fond of that early hour, busy though it was, for David was always before her with blazing fires; and while she got breakfast, he came and went with wood and water, milk and marketing; often stopping to talk, and always in his happiest mood.

The first snow-fall had made the world wonderfully lovely that morning: and Christie stood at the window, admiring the bridal look of the earth, as it lay dazzlingly white in the early sunshine. The little parlour was fresh and clean, with no speck of dust anywhere; the fire burned on the bright andirons; the flowers were rejoicing in their morning bath; and the table was set out with dainty care. So homelike, so pleasant, so very dear to her, that Christie yearned to stay, yet dared not, and had barely time to steady face and voice, when David came in with the little posies he always had ready for his mother and Christie at breakfast time. Only a flower by their plates; but it meant much to them; for, in these lives of ours, tender little acts do more to bind

hearts together than great deeds or heroic words; since the first are like the dear daily bread that none can live without; the latter but occasional feasts, beautiful and memorable, but not possible to all.

This morning David laid a sprig of sweet-scented balm at his mother's place, two or three rosy daisies at Kitty's, and a bunch of Christie's favourite violets at hers. She smiled as her eye went from the scentless daisies, so pertly pretty, to her own posy full of perfume, and the half-sad, half-sweet associations that haunt these blue-eyed flowers.

"I wanted pansies for you, but not one would bloom; so I did the next best, since you don't like roses," said David, as Christie stood looking at the violets with a thoughtful face, for something in the peculiarly graceful arrangement of the heart-shaped leaves recalled another nosegay to her mind.

"I like these very much, because they came to me in the beginning of this, the happiest year of my life;" and scarcely knowing why, except that it was very sweet to talk with David in the early sunshine, she told about

the flowers some one had given her at church. As she finished she looked up at him; and, though his face was perfectly grave, his eyes laughed, and with a sudden conviction of the truth, Christie exclaimed,—

"David, I do believe it was you!"

"I couldn't help it; you seemed so touched and troubled. I longed to speak to you, but didn't dare, so dropped the flowers and got away as fast as possible. Did you think it very rude?"

"I thought it the sweetest thing that ever happened to me. That was my first step along a road that you have strewn with flowers ever since. I can't thank you, but I never shall forget it." Christie spoke out fervently, and for an instant her heart shone in her face. Then she checked herself, and, fearing she had said too much, fell to slicing bread with an energetic rapidity which resulted in a cut finger. Dropping the knife, she tried to get her handkerchief, but the blood flowed fast, and the pain of a deep gash made her a little faint. David sprang to help her, tied up the wound, put her in the big chair, held water to

her lips, and bathed her temples with a wet napkin; silently, but so tenderly, that it was almost too much for poor Christie.

For one happy moment her head lay on his arm, and his hand brushed back her hair with a touch that was a caress; she heard his heart beat fast with anxiety; felt his breath on her cheek, and wished that she might die then and there, though a bread knife was not a romantic weapon, nor a cut finger as interesting as a broken heart. Kitty's voice made her start up, and the blissful vision of life, with David in the little house alone, vanished like a bright bubble, leaving the hard reality to be lived out with nothing but a woman's pride to conceal a woman's most passionate pain.

"It's nothing; I'm all right now. Don't say anything to worry your mother; I'll put on a bit of court-plaster, and no one will be the wiser," she said, hastily removing all traces of the accident but her own pale face.

"Poor Christie, it's hard that you should go away with a wound like this on the hand that has done so much for us," said David, as

he carefully adjusted the black strip on that forefinger, roughened by many stitches set for him.

"I loved to do it," was all Christie trusted herself to say.

"I know you did; and in your own words I can only answer, 'I don't know how to thank you, but I never shall forget it.'" And David kissed the wounded hand as gratefully and reverently as if its palm was not hardened by the humblest tasks.

If he had only known—oh, if he had only known!—how easily he might repay that debt, and heal the deeper wound in Christie's heart. As it was, she could only say, "You are too kind," and begin to shovel tea into the pot, as Kitty came in, as rosy and fresh as the daisies she put in her hair.

"Ain't they becoming?" she asked, turning to David for admiration.

"No, thank you," he answered absently, looking out over her head, as he stood upon the rug in the attitude which the best men *will* assume in the bosoms of their families.

Kitty looked offended, and turned to the

mirror for comfort; while Christie went on shovelling tea, quite unconscious what she was about till David said gravely,—

"Won't that be rather strong?"

"How stupid of me! I always forget that Kitty does not drink tea," and Christie rectified her mistake with all speed.

Kitty laughed, and said in her pert little way,—

"Getting up early don't seem to agree with either of you this morning: I wonder what you've been doing?"

"Your work. Suppose you bring in the kettle: Christie has hurt her hand."

David spoke quietly; but Kitty looked as much surprised as if he had boxed her ears, for he had never used that tone to her before. She meekly obeyed; and David added with a smile to Christie,—

"Mother is coming down, and you'll have to get more colour into your cheeks, if you mean to hide your accident from her."

"That is easily done," and Christie rubbed her pale cheeks till they rivalled Kitty's in their bloom.

"How well you women know how to conceal your wounds," said David, half to himself.

"It is an invaluable accomplishment for us sometimes: you forget that I have been an actress," answered Christie, with a bitter sort of smile.

"I wish I could forget what *I* have been!" muttered David, turning his back to her and kicking a log that had rolled out of place.

In came Mrs. Sterling, and every one brightened up to meet her. Kitty was silent, and wore an injured air which nobody minded; Christie was very lively; and David did his best to help her through that last meal, which was a hard one to three out of the four.

At noon a carriage came for Christie, and she said "good-bye," as she had drilled herself to say it, cheerfully and steadily.

"It is only for a time, else I couldn't let thee go, my dear," said Mrs. Sterling, with a close embrace.

"I shall see you at church, and Tuesday evenings, even if you don't find time to come to us, so I shall not say 'good-bye' at all; and

David shook hands warmly, as he put her into the carriage.

"I'll invite you to my wedding when I make up my mind," said Kitty, with feminine malice; for in her eyes Christie was an old maid, who doubtless envied her her "lots of lovers."

"I hope you will be very happy. In the meantime try to save dear Mrs. Sterling all you can, and let her make you worthy a good husband," was Christie's answer to a speech she was too noble to resent by a sharp word, or even a contemptuous look.

Then she drove away, smiling and waving her hand to the old lady at her window; but the last thing she saw as she left the well-beloved lane, was David going slowly up the path, with Kitty close beside him, talking busily. If she had heard the short dialogue between them, the sight would have been less bitter, for Kitty said,—

"She's dreadful good; but I'm glad she's gone, ain't you?"

"No."

"Had you rather have her here than me?"

"Yes." ə poor.

"Then why don't you ask her to herself back?" ɔured

"I would if I could!"

"I never did see anything like it; every one is so queer and cross to-day, I get snubbed all round. If folks ain't good to me, I'll go and marry Miles! I declare I will."

"You'd better," and with that David left her frowning and pouting in the porch, and went to shovelling snow with unusual vigour.

David
the ca
"I"

## CHAPTER V.

### WHICH?

MR. POWER received Christie so hospitably that she felt at home at once, and took up her new duties with the energy of one anxious to repay a favour. Her friend knew well the saving power of work, and gave her plenty of it; but it was a sort that at once interested and absorbed her, so that she had little time for dangerous thoughts or vain regrets. As he once said, Mr. Power made her own troubles seem light by showing her others so terribly real and great that she was ashamed to repine at her own lot.

Her gift of sympathy served her well, past experience gave her a quick eye to read the truth in others, and the earnest desire to help and comfort made her an excellent almoner

for the rich, a welcome friend to the poor. She was in just the right mood to give herself gladly to any sort of sacrifice, and laboured with a quiet energy, painful to witness had any one known the hidden suffering that would not let her rest.

If she had been a regular novel heroine at this crisis, she would have grown grey in a single night, had a dangerous illness, gone mad, or at least taken to pervading the house at unseasonable hours, with her back hair down, and much wringing of the hands. Being only a commonplace woman, she did nothing so romantic, but instinctively tried to sustain and comfort herself with the humble, wholesome duties and affections which seldom fail to keep heads sane and hearts safe. Yet, though her days seemed to pass so busily and cheerfully, it must be confessed that there were lonely vigils in the night; and sometimes in the morning Christie's eyes were very heavy, Christie's pillow wet with tears.

But life never is all work or sorrow; and happy hours, helpful pleasures, are mercifully given like wayside springs to pilgrims

trudging wearily along. Mr. Power showed Christie many such, and silently provided her with better consolation than pity or advice.

"Deeds not words," was his motto; and he lived it out most faithfully. "Books and work" he gave his new charge; and then followed up that prescription with "healthful play" of a sort she liked, and had longed for all her life. Sitting at his table, Christie saw the best and bravest men and women of our times; for Mr. Power was a magnet that drew them from all parts of the world. She saw and heard, admired and loved them; felt her soul kindle with the desire to follow in their steps, share their great tasks, know their difficulties and dangers, and in the end taste the immortal satisfactions given to those who live and labour for their fellow-men. In such society all other aims seemed poor and petty; for they appeared to live in a nobler world than any she had known, and she felt as if they belonged to another race; not men nor angels, but a delightful mixture of the two, more as she imagined the gods and heroes of

old; not perfect, but wonderfully strong, and brave and good; each gifted with a separate virtue, and each bent on a mission that should benefit mankind.

Nor was this the only pleasure given her. One evening of each week was set apart by Mr. Power for the reception of whomsoever chose to visit him; for his parish was a large one, and his house a safe haunt for refugees from all countries, all oppressions.

Christie enjoyed these evenings heartily, for there was no ceremony; each comer brought his mission, idea, or need, and genuine hospitality made the visit profitable or memorable to all, for entire freedom prevailed, and there was stabling for every one's hobby.

Christie felt that she was now receiving the best culture, acquiring the polish that society gives, and makes truly admirable when character adds warmth and power to its charm. The presence of her bosom-care calmed the old unrest, softened her manners, and at times touched her face with an expression more beautiful than beauty. She was quite unconscious of the changes passing over her;

and if any one had told her she was fast becoming a most attractive woman, she would have been utterly incredulous. But others saw and felt the new charm; for no deep experience bravely borne can fail to leave its mark, often giving power in return for patience, and lending a subtle loveliness to faces whose bloom it has destroyed.

This fact was made apparent to Christie one evening when she went down to the weekly gathering in one of the melancholy moods which sometimes oppressed her. She felt dissatisfied with herself because her interest in all things began to flag, and a restless longing for some new excitement to break up the monotonous pain of her inner life possessed her. Being still a little shy in company, she slipped quietly into a recess which commanded a view of both rooms, and sat looking listlessly about her while waiting for David, who seldom failed to come.

A curious collection of fellow-beings was before her, and at another time she would have found much to interest and amuse her. In one corner a newly-imported German with

an Orson-like head, thumb-ring, and the fragrance of many meerschaums still hovering about him, was hammering away upon some disputed point with a scientific Frenchman, whose national politeness was only equalled by his national volubility. A prominent statesman was talking with a fugitive slave; a young poet getting inspiration from the face and voice of a handsome girl, who had earned the right to put M.D. to her name. An old philosopher was calming the ardour of several rampant radicals, and a famous singer was comforting the heart of an Italian exile by talking politics in his own melodious tongue.

There were plenty of reformers; some as truculent as Martin Luther; others as beaming and benevolent as if the pelting of the world had only mellowed them, and no amount of denunciatory thunder could sour the milk of human kindness creaming in their happy hearts. There were eager women just beginning their protest against the wrongs that had wrecked their peace; subdued women who had been worsted in the unequal

conflict, and given it up; resolute women with "No surrender" written all over their strong-minded countenances; and sweet, hopeful women, whose faith in God and man nothing could shake or sadden.

But to Christie there was only one face worth looking at till David came, and that was Mr. Power's; for he was a perfect host, and pervaded the rooms like a genial atmosphere, using the welcome of eye and hand which needs no language to interpret it, giving to each guest the intellectual fare he loved, and making their enjoyment his own.

"Bless the dear man! what should we all do without him?" thought Christie, following him with grateful eyes, as he led an awkward youth in rusty black to the statesman whom it had been the desire of his ambitious soul to meet.

The next minute she proved that *she* at least could do without the "dear man," for David entered the room, and she forgot all about him. Here and at church were the only places where the friends had met during these months, except one or two short visits

to the little house in the lane when Christie devoted herself to Mrs. Sterling.

David was quite unchanged, though once or twice Christie fancied he seemed ill at ease with her, and immediately tormented herself with the idea that some alteration in her own manner had perplexed or offended him. She did her best to be as frank and cordial as in the happy old days; but it was impossible, and she soon gave it up, assuming, in the place of that former friendliness, a grave and quiet manner which would have led a wiser man than David to believe her busied with her own affairs, and rather indifferent to everything else.

If he had known how her heart danced in her bosom, her eyes brightened, and all the world became endurable, the moment he appeared, he would not have been so long in joining her, nor have doubted what welcome awaited him.

As it was, he stopped to speak to his host; and, before he reappeared, Christie had found the excitement she had been longing for.

"Now some bore will keep him an hour, and the evening is *so* short," she thought, with a pang of disappointment; and, turning her eyes away from the crowd which had swallowed up her heart's desire, they fell upon a gentleman just entering, and remained fixed with an expression of unutterable surprise; for there, elegant, calm, and cool as ever, stood Mr. Fletcher.

"How came he here?" was her first question; "How will he behave to me?" her second. As she could answer neither, she composed herself as fast as possible, resolving to let matters take their own course, and feeling in the mood for an encounter with a discarded lover, as she took a womanish satisfaction in remembering that the very personable gentleman before her had once been.

Mr. Fletcher and his companion passed on to find their host; and with a glance at the mirror opposite, which showed her that the surprise of the moment had given her the colour she lacked before, Christie occupied herself with a portfolio of engravings, feeling

very much as she used to feel when waiting at a side-scene for her cue.

She had not long to wait before Mr. Power came up, and presented the stranger; for such he fancied him, never having heard a certain episode in Christie's life. Mr. Fletcher bowed, with no sign of recognition in his face, and began to talk in the smooth, low voice she remembered so well. For the moment, through sheer surprise, Christie listened and replied as any young lady might have done to a new-made acquaintance. But very soon she felt sure that Mr. Fletcher intended to ignore the past; and, finding her on a higher round of the social ladder, to accept the fact and begin again.

At first she was angry, then amused, then interested in the somewhat dramatic turn affairs were taking, and very wisely decided to meet him on his own ground, and see what came of it.

In the midst of an apparently absorbing discussion of one of Raphael's most insipid Madonnas, she was conscious that David had approached, paused, and was scrutinizing her

companion with unusual interest. Seized with a sudden desire to see the two men together, Christie beckoned; and when he obeyed, she introduced him, drew him into the conversation, and then left him in the lurch by falling silent and taking notes while they talked.

If she wished to wean her heart from David by seeing him at a disadvantage, she could have devised no better way; for, though a very feminine test, it answered the purpose excellently.

Mr. Fletcher was a handsome man, and just then looked his best. Improved health gave energy and colour to his formerly sallow, listless face: the cold eyes were softer, the hard mouth suave and smiling, and about the whole man there was that indescribable something which often proves more attractive than worth or wisdom to keener-sighted women than Christie. Never had he talked better; for, as if he suspected what was in the mind of one hearer, he exerted himself to be as brilliant as possible, and succeeded admirably.

David never appeared so ill, for he had no clue to the little comedy being played before him; and long seclusion and natural reserve unfitted him to shine beside a man of the world like Mr. Fletcher. His simple English sounded harsh, after the foreign phrases that slipped so easily over the other's tongue. He had visited no galleries, seen few of the world's wonders, and could only listen when they were discussed. More than once he was right, but failed to prove it; for Mr. Fletcher skilfully changed the subject, or quenched him with a politely incredulous shrug.

Even in the matter of costume, poor David was worsted; for in a woman's eyes dress has wonderful significance. Christie used to think his suit of sober grey the most becoming man could wear; but now it looked shapeless and shabby beside garments which bore the stamp of Paris in the gloss and grace of broadcloth and fine linen. David wore no gloves: Mr. Fletcher's were immaculate. David's tie was so plain no one observed it: Mr. Fletcher's elegant and fault-

less enough for a modern Beau Brummel. David's handkerchief was of the commonest sort (she knew that, for she hemmed it herself): Mr. Fletcher's was the finest cambric, and a delicate breath of perfume refreshed the aristocratic nose to which the article belonged.

Christie despised herself as she made these comparisons, and felt how superficial they were; but, having resolved to exalt one man at the expense of the other for her own good, she did not relent till David took advantage of a pause, and left them with a reproachful look that made her wish Mr. Fletcher at the bottom of the sea.

When they were alone a subtle change in his face and manner convinced her that he also had been taking notes, and had arrived at a favourable decision regarding herself. Women are quick at making such discoveries; and even while she talked with him as a stranger she felt assured that, if she chose, she might make him again her lover.

Here was a temptation! She had longed for some new excitement, and fate seemed to

have put one of the most dangerous within her reach. It was natural to find comfort in the knowledge that somebody loved her, and to take pride in her power over one man, because another did not own it. In spite of her better self, she felt the fascination of the hour, and yielded to it, half unconsciously assuming something of the "dash and daring" which Mr. Fletcher had once confessed to finding so captivating in the demure governess. He evidently thought so still, and played his part with spirit; for, while apparently enjoying a conversation which contained no allusion to the past, the memory of it gave piquancy to that long *tête-à-tête*.

As the first guests began to go, Mr. Fletcher's friend beckoned to him; and he rose, saying, with an accent of regret which changed to one of entreaty, as he put his question,—

"I too must go. May I come again, Miss Devon?"

"I am scarcely more than a guest myself; but Mr. Power is always glad to see whoever cares to come," replied Christie rather primly,

though her eyes were dancing with amusement at the recollection of those love passages upon the beach.

"Next time, I shall come not as a stranger, but as a former—may I say friend?" he added quickly, as if emboldened by the mirthful eyes that so belied the demure lips.

"Now you forget your part," and Christie's primness vanished in a laugh. "I am glad of it, for I want to ask about Mrs. Saltonstall and the children. I've often thought of the little dears, and longed to see them."

"They are in Paris with their father."

"Mrs. Saltonstall is well, I hope?"

"She died six months ago."

An expression of genuine sorrow came over Mr. Fletcher's face as he spoke; and, remembering that the silly little woman was his sister, Christie put out her hand with a look and gesture so full of sympathy that words were unnecessary. Taking advantage of this propitious moment, he said, with an expressive glance and effective tone, "I am all alone now. You *will* let me come again?"

"Certainly, if it can give you pleasure,"

she answered heartily, forgetting herself in pity for his sorrow.

Mr. Fletcher pressed her hand with a grateful, "Thank you!" and wisely went away at once, leaving compassion to plead for him better than he could have done it for himself.

Leaning back in her chair, Christie was thinking over this interview so intently that she started when David's voice said close beside her,—

"Shall I disturb you if I say, 'Good-night'?"

"I thought you were not going to say it at all," she answered rather sharply.

"I've been looking for a chance; but you were so absorbed with that man I had to wait."

"Considering the elegance of 'that man,' you don't treat him with much respect."

"I don't feel much. What brought him here, I wonder? A French *salon* is more in his line."

"He came to see Mr. Power, as every one else does, of course."

"Don't dodge, Christie: you know he came to see you."

"How do you like him?" she asked, with treacherous abruptness.

"Not particularly, so far. But if I knew him, I dare say I should find many good traits in him."

"I know you would!" said Christie warmly, not thinking of Fletcher, but of David's kindly way of finding good in every one.

"He must have improved since you saw him last; for then, if I remember rightly, you found him 'lazy, cross, selfish, and conceited.'"

"Now, David, I never said anything of the sort," began Christie, wondering what possessed him to be so satirical and short with her.

"Yes, you did, last September, sitting on the old apple-tree the morning of your birthday."

"What an inconvenient memory you have! Well, he *was* all that then; but he is not an invalid now, and so we see his real self."

"I also remember that you gave me the impression that he was an elderly man."

"Isn't forty elderly?"

"He wasn't forty when you taught his sister's children."

"No; but he looked older than he does now, being so ill. I used to think he would be very handsome with good health: and now I see I was right," said Christie, with feigned enthusiasm; for it was a new thing to tease David, and she liked it.

But she got no more of it; for just then the singer began to sing to the select few who remained, and every one was silent. Leaning on the high back of Christie's chair, David watched the reflection of her face in the long mirror; for she listened to the music with downcast eyes, unconscious what eloquent expressions were passing over her countenance. She seemed a new Christie to David, in that excited mood; and, as he watched her, he thought,—

"She loved this man once, or he loved her; and to-night it all comes back to her. How will it end?"

So earnestly did he try to read that altered face that Christie felt the intentness of his gaze, looked up suddenly, and met his eyes in the glass. Something in the expression of those usually serene eyes, now darkened and dilated with the intensity of that long scrutiny, surprised and troubled her; and, scarcely knowing what she said, she asked quickly,—

"Who are you admiring?"

"Not myself."

"I wonder if you'd think me vain if I ask you something that I want to know?" she said, obeying a sudden impulse.

"Ask it, and I'll tell you."

"Am I much changed since you first knew me?"

"Very much."

"For the better or the worse?"

"The better, decidedly."

"Thank you, I hoped so; but one never knows how one seems to other people. I was wondering what you saw in the glass."

"A good and lovely woman, Christie."

How sweet it sounded to hear David say that! so simply and sincerely that it was far

more than a mere compliment. She did not thank him, but said softly as if to herself,—

"So let me seem until I be"

—and then sat silent, so full of satisfaction in the thought that David found her "good and lovely," she could not resist stealing a glance at the tell-tale mirror to see if she might believe him.

She forgot herself, however; for he was off guard now, and stood looking away with brows knit, lips tightly set, and eyes fixed, yet full of fire; his whole attitude and expression that of a man intent on subduing some strong impulse by a yet stronger will.

It startled Christie; and she leaned forward, watching him with breathless interest till the song ceased, and, with the old impatient gesture, David seemed to relapse into his accustomed quietude.

"It was the wonderful music that excited him, that was all," thought Christie; yet, when he came round to say "good-night," the strange expression was not gone, and his manner was not his own.

"Shall *I* ask if I may come again?" he said, imitating Mr. Fletcher's graceful bow with an odd smile.

"I let him come because he has lost his sister, and is lonely," began Christie, but got no farther, for David said "Good-night!" abruptly, and was gone without a word to Mr. Power.

"He's in a hurry to get back to his Kitty," she thought, tormenting herself with feminine skill. "Never mind," she added, with a defiant sort of smile, *I've* got my Philip, handsomer and more in love than ever, if I'm not deceived. I wonder if he *will* come again?"

Mr. Fletcher did come again, and with flattering regularity, for several weeks, evidently finding something very attractive in those novel gatherings. Mr. Power soon saw why he came; and, as Christie seemed to enjoy his presence, the good man said nothing to disturb her, though he sometimes cast an anxious glance towards the recess where the two usually sat, apparently busy with books or pictures; yet, by their faces, showing that

an undercurrent of deeper interest than art or literature flowed through their intercourse.

Christie had not deceived herself, and it was evident that her old lover meant to try his fate again, if she continued to smile upon him as she had done of late. He showed her his sunny side now, and very pleasant she found it. The loss of his sister had touched his heart, and made him long to fill the place her death left vacant. Better health sweetened his temper, and woke the desire to do something worth the doing; and the sight of the only woman he had ever really loved, reawakened the sentiment that had not died, and made it doubly sweet.

Why he cared for Christie he could not tell, but he never had forgotten her; and, when he met her again with that new beauty in her face, he felt that time had only ripened the blithe girl into a deep-hearted woman, and he loved her with a better love than before. His whole manner showed this; for the half-careless, half-condescending air of former times was replaced by the most courteous respect, a sincere desire to win her favour, and

at times the tender sort of devotion women find so charming.

Christie felt all this, enjoyed it, and tried to be grateful for it in the way he wished, thinking that hearts could be managed like children, and when one toy is unattainable, be appeased by a bigger or a brighter one of another sort.

"I must love some one," she said, as she leaned over a basket of magnificent flowers just left for her by Mr. Fletcher's servant, a thing which often happened now. "Philip has loved me with a fidelity that ought to touch my heart. Why not accept him, and enjoy a new life of luxury, novelty, and pleasure? All these things he can give me; all these things are valued, admired, and sought for; and who would appreciate them more than I? I could travel, cultivate myself in many delightful ways, and do so much good. No matter if I was not very happy: I should make Philip so, and have it in my power to comfort many poor souls. That ought to satisfy me; for what is nobler than to live for others?"

This idea attracted her, as it does all generous natures; she became enamoured of self-sacrifice, and almost persuaded herself that it was her duty to marry Mr. Fletcher, whether she loved him or not, in order that she might dedicate her life to the service of poorer, sadder creatures than herself.

But, in spite of this amiable delusion, in spite of the desire to forget the love she would have in the love she might have, and in spite of the great improvement in her faithful Philip, Christie could not blind herself to the fact that her head, rather than her heart, advised the match; she could not conquer a suspicion that, however much Mr. Fletcher might love his wife, he would be something of a tyrant, and she was very sure she never would make a good slave. In her cooler moments, she remembered that men are not puppets, to be moved as a woman's will commands, and the uncertainty of being able to carry out her charitable plans made her pause to consider whether she would not be selling her liberty too cheaply if, in return, she got only de-

pendence and bondage along with fortune and a home.

So tempted and perplexed, self-deluded and self-warned, attracted and repelled, was poor Christie, that she began to feel as if she had got into a labyrinth without any clue to bring her safely out. She longed to ask advice of some one, but could not turn to Mrs. Sterling; and what other woman friend had she except Rachel, from whom she had not heard for months?

As she asked herself this question one day, feeling sure that Mr. Fletcher would come in the evening, and would soon put his fortune to the touch again, the thought of Mrs. Wilkins seemed to answer her.

"Why not?" said Christie; "she is sensible, kind, and discreet; she may put me right, for I'm all in a tangle now with doubts and fears, feelings and fancies. I'll go and see her; that will do me good, even if I don't say a word about my 'werryments,' as the dear soul would call them."

Away she went, and fortunately found her friend alone in the "settin'-room," darning

away at a perfect stack of socks, as she creaked comfortably to and fro in her old rocking-chair.

"I was jest wishin' somebody would drop in; it's so kinder lonesome with the children to school and Adelaide asleep. How be you, dear?" said Mrs. Wilkins, with a hospitable hug and a beaming smile.

"I'm worried in my mind, so I came to see you," answered Christie, sitting down with a sigh.

"Bless your dear heart, what *is* to pay? Free your mind, and I'll do my best to lend a hand."

The mere sound of that hearty voice comforted Christie, and gave her courage to introduce the little fiction under which she had decided to defraud Mrs. Wilkins of her advice. So she helped herself to a very fragmentary blue sock and a big needle, that she might have employment for her eyes, as they were not so obedient as her tongue, and then began in as easy a tone as she could assume.

"Well, you see, a friend of mine wants my advice on a very serious matter, and I really

don't know what to give her. It is strictly confidential, you know, so I won't mention any names, but just set the case before you and get your opinion, for I've great faith in your sensible way of looking at things."

"Thanky, dear, you're welcome to my 'pinion ef it's wuth anything. Be these folks you tell of young?" asked Mrs. Wilkins, with evident relish for the mystery.

"No, the woman is past thirty, and the man 'most forty, I believe," said Christie, darning away in some trepidation at having taken the first plunge.

"My patience! ain't the creater old enough to know her own mind? for I s'pose she's the one in the quanderry?" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins, looking over her spectacles with dangerously keen eyes.

"The case is this," said Christie, in guilty haste. "The 'creature' is poor and nobody, the man rich and of good family, so you see it's rather hard for her to decide."

"No, I don't see nothin' of the sort," returned blunt Mrs. Wilkins. "Ef she loves the man, take him; ef she don't, give him the

mittin and done with it. Money and friends and family ain't much to do with the matter, accordin' to my view. It's jest a plain question betwixt them two. Ef it takes much settlin', they'd better let it alone."

"She doesn't love him as much as she might, I fancy, but she is tired of grubbing along alone. He is very fond of her, and very rich, and it would be a fine thing for her in a worldly way, I'm sure."

"Oh, she's goin' to marry for a livin', is she? Wal, now, I'd ruther one of my girls should grub the wust kind all their days than do that. Hows'ever, it may suit some folks ef they ain't got much heart, and is contented with fine clothes, nice vittles, and handsome furnitoor. Selfish, cold, silly kinder women might git on, I dare say, but I shouldn't think any friend of your'n would be one of that sort."

"But she might do a great deal of good, and make others happy, even if she was not so herself."

"She might, but I doubt it, for money got that way wouldn't prosper wal. Mis'able

folks ain't half so charitable as happy ones, and I don't believe five dollars from one of 'em would go half so fur, or be half so comfortin', as a kind word straight out of a cheerful heart. I know some thinks that is a dreadful smart thing to do, but *I* don't, and ef any one wants to go a sacrificin' herself for the good of others, there's better ways of doin' it than startin' with a lie in her mouth."

Mrs. Wilkins spoke warmly, for Christie's face made her fiction perfectly transparent, though the good woman, with true delicacy, showed no sign of intelligence on that point.

"Then you wouldn't advise my friend to say yes?"

"Sakes alive, no! I'd say to her as I did to my younger sisters when their courtin' time come. 'Jest be sure you're right as to there bein' love enough, then go ahead, and the Lord will bless you!'"

"Did they follow your advice?"

"They did, and both is prosperin' in different ways. Gusty, she found she was well on't for love, so she married, though Samuel

Buck was poor, and they're happy as can be a-workin' up together, same as Lisha and me did. Addy, she calc'lated she wan't satisfied somehow, so she *didn't* marry, though James Miller was wal off, and she's kep' stiddy to her trade, and ain't never repented. There's a sight said and writ about such things," continued Mrs. Wilkins, rambling on to give Christie time to think, "but I've an idee that women's hearts is to be trusted ef they ain't been taught all wrong. Jest let 'em remember that they take a husband for wuss as well as better (and there's a sight of wuss in this tryin' world for some on us), and be ready to do their part patient and faithful, and I ain't a grain afraid but what they'll be fetched through, always pervidin' they love the man and not his money."

There was a pause after that last speech, and Christie felt as if her perplexity was clearing away very fast, for Mrs. Wilkins's plain talk seemed to show the things in their true light, with all the illusions of false sentiment and false reasoning stripped away. She felt clearer and stronger already, and as if she

could make up her mind very soon when one other point had been discussed.

"I fancy my friend is somewhat influenced by the fact that this man loved and asked her to marry him some years ago. He has not forgotten her, and this touches her heart more than anything else. It seems as if his love must be genuine to last so long, and not to mind her poverty, want of beauty, and accomplishments, for he is a proud and fastidious man."

"I think wal of him for that!" said Mrs. Wilkins, approvingly, "but I guess she's wuth all he gives her, for there must be somethin' pretty gennywin' in her to make him overlook her lacks and hold on so stiddy. It don't alter *her* side of the case one mite though, for love is love, and ef she ain't got it, he'd better not take gratitude instid, but sheer off and leave her for somebody else."

"Nobody else wants her!" broke from Christie like an involuntary cry of pain; then she hid her face by stooping to gather up the avalanche of hosiery which fell from her lap to the floor.

"She can't be sure of that," said Mrs. Wilkins cheerily, though her spectacles were dim with sudden mist. "I know there's a mate for her somewheres, so she'd better wait a spell and trust in Providence. It wouldn't be so pleasant to see the right one come along after she'd went and took the wrong one in a hurry, would it? Waitin' is always safe, and time needn't be wasted in frettin' or bewailin', for the Lord knows there's a sight of good works sufferin' to be done, and single women has the best chance at 'em."

"I've accomplished one good work, at any rate, and, small as it is, I feel better for it. Give this sock to your husband, and tell him his wife sets a good example both by precept and practice to other women, married or single. Thank you very much, both for myself and my friend, who shall profit by your advice," said Christie, feeling that she had better go before she told everything."

"I hope she will," returned Mrs. Wilkins, as her guest went away with a much happier face than the one she brought. "And ef I know her, which I think I do, she'll find that

Cinthy Wilkins ain't fur from right, ef her experience is good for anything," added the matron with a sigh, and a glance at a dingy photograph of her Lisha on the wall, a sigh that seemed to say there had been a good deal of "*wuss*" in her bargain, though she was too loyal to confess it.

Something in Christie's face struck Mr. Fletcher at once when he appeared that evening. He had sometimes found her cold and quiet, often gay and capricious, usually earnest and cordial, with a wistful look that searched his face and both won and checked him by its mute appeal, seeming to say, "Wait a little till I have taught my heart to answer as you wish."

To-night her eyes shunned his, and when he caught a glimpse of them they were full of a soft trouble; her manner was kinder than ever before, and yet it made him anxious, for there was a resolute expression about her lips even when she smiled, and though he ventured upon allusions to the past hitherto tacitly avoided, she listened as if it had no tender charm for her.

Being thoroughly in earnest now, Mr. Fletcher resolved to ask the momentous question again without delay. David was not there, and had not been for several weeks, another thorn in Christie's heart, though she showed no sign of regret, and said to herself, "It is better so." His absence left Fletcher master of the field, and he seized the propitious moment.

"Will you show me the new picture? Mr. Power spoke of it, but I do not like to trouble him."

"With pleasure," and Christie led the way to a little room where the newly arrived gift was placed. She knew what was coming, but was ready, and felt a tragic sort of satisfaction in the thought of all she was relinquishing for love of David.

No one was in the room, but a fine copy of Michael Angelo's Fates hung on the wall, looking down at them with weird significance.

"They look as if they would give a stern answer to any questioning of ours," Mr. Fletcher said, after a glance of affected interest.

"They would give a true one, I fancy," answered Christie, shading her eyes as if to see the better.

"I'd rather question a younger, fairer Fate, hoping that she will give me an answer both true and kind. May I, Christie?"

"I will be true but—I cannot be kind." It cost her much to say that; yet she did it steadily, though he held her hand in both his own, and waited for her words with ardent expectation.

"Not yet perhaps—but in time, when I have proved how sincere my love is, how entire my repentance for the ungenerous words you have not forgotten. I wanted you then for my own sake, now I want you for yourself, because I love and honour you above all women. I tried to forget you, but I could not; and all these years have carried in my heart a very tender memory of the girl who dared to tell me that all I could offer her was not worth her love."

"I was mistaken," began Christie, finding this wooing much harder to withstand than the other.

"No, you were right: I felt it then and resented it, but I owned it later, and regretted it more bitterly than I can tell. I'm not worthy of you; I never shall be: but I've loved you for five years without hope, and I'll wait five more if in the end you will come to me. Christie, I need you very much!"

If Mr. Fletcher had gone down upon his knees and poured out the most ardent protestations that ever left a lover's lips, it would not have touched her as did that last little appeal, uttered with a break in the voice that once was so proud and was so humble now.

"Forgive me!" she cried, looking up at him with real respect in her face, and real remorse smiting her conscience. "Forgive me! I have misled you and myself. I tried to love you: I was grateful for your regard, touched by your fidelity, and I hoped I might repay it; but I cannot! I cannot!"

"Why?"

Such a hard question! She owed him all the truth, yet how could she tell it? She could not in words, but her face did, for the colour rose and burned on cheeks and fore-

head with painful fervour; her eyes fell, and her lips trembled as if endeavouring to keep down the secret that was escaping against her will. A moment of silence as Mr. Fletcher searched for the truth and found it; then he said, with such sharp pain in his voice that Christie's heart ached at the sound,—

"I see: I am too late?"

"Yes."

"And there is no hope?"

"None."

"Then there is nothing more for me to say but good-bye. May you be happy."

"I shall not be;—I have no hope;—I only try to be true to you and to myself. Oh, believe it, and pity me as I do you!"

As the words broke from Christie, she covered up her face, bowed down with the weight of remorse, that made her long to atone for what she had done by any self-humiliation.

Mr. Fletcher was at his best at that moment; for real love ennobles the worst and weakest while it lasts; but he could not resist the temptation that confession offered him. He

tried to be generous, but the genuine virtue was not in him; he did want Christie very much, and the knowledge of a rival in her heart only made her the dearer.

"I'm not content with your pity, sweet as it is: I want your love, and I believe that I might earn it if you would let me try. You are all alone, and life is hard to you: come to me and let me make it happier. I'll be satisfied with friendship till you can give me more."

He said this very tenderly, caressing the bent head while he spoke, and trying to express by tone and gesture how eagerly he longed to receive and cherish what that other man neglected.

Christie felt this to her heart's core, and for a moment longed to end the struggle, say, "Take me," and accept the shadow for the substance. But those last words of his vividly recalled the compact made with David that happy birthday night. How could she be his friend if she was Mr. Fletcher's wife? She knew she could not be true to both, while her heart reversed the sentiment she

then would owe them: David's friendship was dearer than Philip's love, and she would keep it at all costs. These thoughts flashed through her mind in the drawing of a breath, and she looked up saying, steadily in spite of wet eyes and still burning cheeks,—

"Hope nothing; wait for nothing from me. I will have no more delusions for either of us: it is weak and wicked, for I know I shall not change. Some time we may venture to be friends perhaps, but not now. Forgive me, and be sure I shall suffer more than you for this mistake of mine."

When she had denied his suit before he had been ungenerous and angry: for his pride was hurt and his will thwarted: now his heart bled and hope died hard; but all that was manliest in him rose to help him bear the loss, for *this* love was genuine, and made him both just and kind. His face was pale with the pain of that fruitless passion, and his voice betrayed how hard he strove for self-control as he said, hurriedly,—

"*You* need not suffer: this mistake has given me the happiest hours of my life, and

I am better for having known so sweet and true a woman. God bless you, Christie!" and with a quick embrace that startled her by its suddenness and strength he left her, standing there alone before the three grim Fates.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MIDSUMMER.

"NOW it is all over. I shall never have another chance like that, and must make up my mind to be a lonely and laborious spinster all my life. Youth is going fast, and I have little in myself to attract or win, though David did call me 'good and lovely.' I'll try to deserve it, and not let disappointment sour or sadden me, but it won't be easy."

Christie often said this to herself during the long hard days that followed Mr. Fletcher's disappearance; a disappearance, by the way, which caused Mr. Power much secret satisfaction, though he only betrayed it by added kindness to Christie, and in his manner an increased respect that was very comforting

to her. But she missed her lover, for nothing now broke up the monotony of her busy useful life. She had enjoyed that little episode, for it had lent romance to everything while it lasted, even the charity basket with which she went her rounds, for Mr. Fletcher had often met her and carried it as if to prove the sincerity of his devotion. No bouquets came now, no graceful little notes with books or invitations to some coveted pleasure; no dangerously delightful evenings in the recess, where for a time she felt and used that power which to a woman is so full of subtle satisfaction; no bitter-sweet hopes, no exciting dreams of what might be with the utterance of a word; no uncertainty to give zest to every hour that passed. Nothing but a daily round of duties now, a little leisure that hung heavy on her hands, with no hope to stimulate, no lover to lighten it, and a sore, sad heart that would clamour for its love, and even when pride silenced it, ached on with the dull pain which only time and patience have the power to heal.

But as those weeks went slowly by she

began to discover some of the miracles true love can work. She thought she had laid it in its grave, but an angel rolled the stone away, and the lost passion rose stronger, purer, more beautiful than when she buried it with bitter tears. A spirit fed by no hope, warmed by no tenderness, clothed in no fond delusion; the vital soul of love, which outlives the fairest, noblest form in which human hearts may clothe it, and sits singing among the ruins time may make the immortal hymn of consolation the Great Musician taught it.

Christie felt the strange comfort resting like a baby in her lonely bosom, cherished and blessed it, wondering while she rejoiced, but perceiving soon by the swift instincts of a womanly woman that this was only another lesson hard to learn, but infinitely precious, helpful, and sustaining when once learned. She was not happy, only patient; not hopeful, but trusting; and when life looked hard and dark without, she went away into that inner world of deep feeling, high thought, and earnest aspiration all may possess, if

experience has made within them "the nunnery of a chaste heart and quiet mind."

Women live fast; and Christie fought her battle, won her victory, and found peace declared in that one winter, for her loyalty to love was repaid at last by the tranquillity which comes to those who submit, and ask nothing but fortitude.

She had seen little of David except at church, and began to regard him as a sort of symbol of the friend whom she once knew and loved; as one might look at a statue on a tomb, the marble effigy of the beloved dead below. He always found her out, gave her the posy she best liked, said cheerfully, "How goes it, Christie?" and she always answered, "I am well and busy." They sat together listening to Mr. Power, sang from the same book, walked a little way side by side, and parted for another week.

Christie sometimes wondered what prayers David prayed when he sat so still with his face hidden by his hand, and looked up with such clear, steady eyes when he had done. She tried to do the same, and though her

thoughts would wander to the motionless grey figure beside her, she felt as if peace and strength unconsciously flowed from it to sustain and comfort her. Some of her happiest moments now were those she spent sitting there pale and silent, with absent eyes and the lips that would tremble now and then hidden by the flowers held before them, kissed covertly, and kept like relics long after they were dead.

One bitter drop always marred the sad pleasure of that hour, for when she had asked tenderly for Mrs. Sterling, and sent her love, she forced herself to say kindly,—

"And Kitty, is she doing well?"

"Capitally; come and see how she has improved, we are quite proud of her."

"I will, if I can find time. It's a hard winter, and we have so much to do," she would answer smiling, and then go home to struggle back to the better mood she tried to make habitual.

But she seldom found time to go and see Kitty's improvement; and when she did run out for an hour she failed to see anything but

increased prettiness, more coquetry, and a certain air of superiority which tried her very much.

"I'm ready for it," she always said after one of these rare visits, with a resolute air; but she was not, as was proved when the time came, as she thought.

Passing out of a store one day she saw Kitty all in her best, buying white gloves, with a most important air. "That looks suspicious," thought Christie, and stopped to speak to her.

"All well at home?" she asked.

"Grandma and I have been alone for a week; David went off on business, but he's back now and—oh, my goodness! I forgot; I'm not to tell a soul yet," and Kitty nodded, pursed up her red lips, and looked quite oppressed with some great secret.

"Bless me, how mysterious! I won't ask any dangerous questions; only tell me if the dear old lady is well?" said Christie, desperately curious, but too proud to show it.

"She's well, but dreadfully upset by what's happened; and well she may be;" and Kitty

shook her head with a look that had both triumph and malicious merriment in it.

"Mr. Sterling is all right, I hope?" Christie never called him David to Kitty, so that impertinent little person took especial pains to speak familiarly, sometimes fondly, of him to Christie.

"Dear fellow, he's so happy; he don't know what to do with himself. I just wish you could see him go round smiling and singing, and looking as if he'd like to dance."

"That looks as if he was going to get a chance to do it," said Christie, with a glance at the gloves as Kitty turned from the counter.

"So he is," laughed Kitty, patting the little parcel with a joyful face.

"I do believe you're going to be married!" exclaimed Christie, half distracted with painful curiosity.

"I am; but it isn't to Miles. Don't you say another word, for I'm dying to tell, but I promised David I wouldn't. He wants to do it himself. By by;" and Kitty hurried away, radiant with superior knowledge, leaving

Christie as pale and startled as if she had seen a ghost at noon-day.

She had; for the thought of David's marrying Kitty had haunted her incessantly all those months, and now she was quite sure the blow had come.

"If she were only a nobler woman I could bear it better. But I am sure he will regret it when the first illusion is over. I fancy she reminds him of his lost Letty, and so he thinks he loves her. Ah, well, I pray he may be happy, and I hope it will be over soon," thought Christie, with a groan, as she trudged away to carry comfort to those whose woes could be relieved by tea and sugar, flannel petticoats, and orders for a load of wood.

It *was* over soon, but not as Christie had expected.

That evening Mr. Power was called away, and she sat alone, bravely trying to forget suspense and grief in copying the record of her last month's labour. But she made sad work of it, for her mind was full of David and his wife, so happy in the little home which had grown doubly dear to her since she left it.

No wonder, then, that she put down "Two dozen children to Mrs. Flanagan," and "Four knit hoods with the measles;" or that a great blot fell upon "Twenty yards red flannel," as the pen dropped from the hands she clasped together, saying, with all the fervour of true self-abnegation, "I hope he will be happy! oh, I hope he will be happy!"

If ever woman deserved reward for patient endeavour, hard won submission, and unselfish love, Christie did then. And she received it in full measure, for the dear Lord requites some faithful hearts—blesses some lives that seemed set apart for silent pain and solitary labour.

Snow was falling fast, and a bitter wind moaned without; the house was very still, and nothing stirred in the room but the flames dancing on the hearth and the thin hand moving to and fro among the records of a useful life. Suddenly the bell rang loudly and repeatedly, as if the new-comer was impatient of delay. Christie paused to listen. It was not Mr. Power's ring, not his voice in the hall below, not his step that came leaping up the stairs

nor his hand that threw wide the door. She knew them all, and her heart stood still an instant; then she gathered up her strength, said low to herself, "Now it is coming," and was ready to meet the truth with a colourless face, set lips, eyes unnaturally bright and fixed, and one hand on her breast, as if to hold in check the rebellious heart that would throb with painful force.

It was David who came with such impetuosity. Snow-flakes shone in his hair, the glow of the keen wind was on his cheek, a smile on his mouth, and in his eyes an expression she had never seen before. Happiness touched with the shadow of past pain, doubt and desire, gratitude and love, all seemed to meet and mingle in it, while about the whole man was the free and ardent air of one relieved from some heavy burden, released from some long captivity.

"Oh, David, what is it?" broke from Christie's lips as he stood looking at her with this strange look.

"News, Christie! such happy news, I can't find words to tell them!" he answered, coming

nearer, but too absorbed in his own emotions to heed hers.

She drew a long breath, and pressed her hand a little heavier on her breast, as she said, with the ghost of a smile, more pathetic than the wildest tears,—

"I guess it, David."

"How?" he demanded, as if defrauded of a joy he had set his heart upon.

"I met Kitty. She told me nothing, but her face betrayed what I have long suspected."

David laughed, such a glad yet scornful laugh, and snatching a little miniature from his pocket, he opened it, saying, with the new impetuosity that changed him so,—

"That is the daughter I have found for my mother. *You* know her, *you* love her, and *you* will not be ashamed to welcome her."

She took it, saw a faded, time-worn likeness of a young girl's happy face, a face strongly familiar, yet for a moment she groped to find the name belonging to it; then it came to her, and she said, half incredulously, half joyfully,—

"It is my Rachel!"

"It is my Letty!" cried David, with an accent of such mingled love and grief, remorse and joy, that Christie seemed to hear in it the death-knell of her faith in him.

The picture fell from the hands she put up, as if to ward off some heavy blow, and her voice was sharp with reproachful anguish as she cried, "Oh, David, David, anything but that!"

An instant he seemed bewildered, then the meaning of the horror in her face flashed on him, and his own grew white with indignant repudiation of the thought that daunted her, but he only said, with the stern brevity of truth,—

"Letty is my sister."

"Forgive me! How could I know? Oh, thank God! thank God!" and dropping into a chair, Christie broke into a passion of the happiest tears she ever shed.

David stood beside her silent till the first irresistible paroxysm was over, then, while she still sat weeping softly, quite bowed down

with gratitude and happiness, he said, sadly now, not sternly,—

"I have no right to resent that unjust belief of yours, for I did wrong my poor Letty almost as much as that lover who, being dead, I do not curse. Let me tell you, Christie, before I ask your confidence again. I never deserved it, but I tried to, for it was very precious to me."

He paused a moment, then went on rapidly, as if anxious to accomplish a hard task, while Christie forgot to weep in listening breathlessly.

"Letty was the pride of my heart, and I loved her very dearly, for she was all I had; such a pretty child, such a gay, sweet girl! how could I help it when she was so fond of me? We were poor then, poorer than now, and she grew restless, tired of hard work, longed for a little pleasure, and could not bear to waste her youth and beauty in that dull place. I never blamed my little girl, but I could not help her, for I was tugging away to fill father's place, he being broken down and helpless. She wanted to go away and

support herself. You know the feeling, and I need not tell you how the proud, high-hearted creature hated dependence, even on a brother who would have worked his soul out for her. She *would* go, and we had faith in her. For a time she did bravely, but life was too hard for her, pleasure too alluring, and when temptation came in the guise of love she could not resist. One dreadful day news came that she was gone, never to come back my innocent, true little Letty any more!"

His voice broke there, and he walked fast through the room, as if the bitter memory of that day was still unbearable.

Christie could not speak for very pity, and he soon went on, pacing restlessly before her, as he had often done when she sat by wondering what unquiet spirit drove him to and fro.

"That was the beginning of my trouble, but not the worst of it; God forgive me, not the worst! Father was very feeble, and it killed him; mother's heart was nearly broken, and all the happiness was taken out of life for me. But I could bear it, heavy as the blow was;

for I had no part in that sin and sorrow. A year later there came to me a letter, a penitent, heart-broken little letter from Letty, praying to be forgiven and taken home again, for her lover was dead and she alone in a foreign land. How would you answer such a letter, Christie?"

"As you did, saying, 'Come home and let me comfort you.'"

"I said, 'You have killed your father, broken your mother's heart, ruined your brother's hopes, and disgraced your family. You no longer have a home with us, and we desire never to see your face again.'"

"Oh, David, that was cruel!"

"I said you did not know me; now you see how deceived you were. A stern, resentful devil possessed me then, and I obeyed it. I was very proud, full of ambitious plans and jealous love for the few I took into my heart. Letty had brought a stain upon our honest name that time could never wash away; had quenched my ardour in despair and shame; had made the house desolate, and destroyed my faith in everything; for what could I

trust when she, the nearest and the dearest creature in the world to me, deceived and deserted me? I could not forgive; wrath burned hot within me, and the desire for retribution would not be appeased till those bitter words were said. The retribution and remorse came swift and sure, but they came most heavily to me."

Still standing where he had paused abruptly as he asked that question, David wrung his strong hands together with a gesture of passionate regret, while his face grew sharp with the remembered suffering of the years he had given to the atonement of that wrong.

Christie put her own hand on those knotted ones, and whispered softly,—

"Don't tell me any more now, I can wait."

"I must, and you must listen. I've longed to tell you, but I was afraid; now you shall know everything, and then decide if you can forgive me for Letty's sake," he said, so resolutely that she listened with a face full of mute compassion.

"That little letter came to me; I never

told my mother, but answered it and kept silent till word came that the ship in which Letty had taken passage was lost. Remorse had been tugging at my heart, and when I knew that she was dead I forgave her with a vain forgiveness, and mourned for my darling as if she had never gone. I told my mother then, and she did not reproach me; but age seemed to fall upon her all at once, and the pathetic quietude you see.

"Then, but for her, I should have been desperate; for day and night Letty's face haunted me, Letty's voice cried, 'Take me in, oh, take me in!' and the very words of that imploring letter burned before my eyes as if written in fire. Do you wonder now that I hid myself, that I had no heart to try for any honourable place in the world, and only struggled to forget, only hoped to expiate, my sin?"

With his head bowed down upon his breast David stood silent, asking himself if he had done enough to win the reward he coveted. Christie's voice seemed to answer him, for she said, with heartfelt admiration and respect,—

"Surely you have atoned for harshness to one woman by years of devotion to many! Was it this that made you a 'brother of girls,' as Mr. Power once called you? and when I asked what he meant, he said the Arabs call a man that who has 'a clean heart to love all women as his sisters, and strength and courage to fight for their protection.'"

She hoped to lighten his trouble a little, as spoke with a smile that was like cordial to poor David's soul.

"Yes," he said, lifting up his head again, "I tried to be that, and for Letty's sake had pity on the most forlorn, patience with the most abandoned; always remembering that she might have been what they were if death had not been more merciful than I."

"But she was *not* dead, she was alive and working as bravely as you. Ah, how little I thought when I loved Rachel and she loved me, that we should ever meet so happily as we soon shall! Tell me how you found her. Does she know I am the Christie she once saved? Tell me all about her and tell it quick," prayed Christie, getting excited as

she more fully grasped the happy fact that Rachel and Letty were one.

David came nearer, and his face kindled as he spoke.

"The ship sailed without her, she came later, and, finding that her name was among the lost, did not deny it; for she *was* dead to us, and decided to remain so till she had earned the right to be forgiven. You know how she lived and worked; stood firm with no one to befriend her till you came, and by years of patient well-doing washed away her single sin. If any one dares think I am ashamed of her now, let him know what cause I have to be proud of her; let him come and see how tenderly I love her, and how devoutly I thank God for permitting me to find and bring my little Letty home."

Only the snow-flakes drifting against the window-pane and the wailing of the wind broke the silence for a moment; then David added, with brightening eyes and a glad voice,—

"I went into a hospital while away to look after one of my poor girls who had been

doing well till illness brought her there. As I was passing out I saw a sleeping face, and stopped involuntarily, it was so like Letty's. I never doubted she was dead, the name over the bed was not hers, the face sadly altered from the happy, rosy one I knew, but it held me fast, and as I paused the eyes opened,—Letty's own soft eyes; they saw me, and as if I were the figure in a dream, she smiled, put up her arms, and said just as she used to say, a child, when I woke her in her little bed, 'Why, Davy!'—I can't tell any more —only that when I brought her home and put her in mother's arms, I felt as if I was forgiven at last."

He broke down there, and went and stood behind the window curtains, letting no one see the grateful tears that washed away the bitterness of those long years.

Christie had taken up the miniature and was looking at it while her heart sang for joy that the lost was found, when David came back to her, wearing the same look she had seen the night she listened among the cloaks. Touched and happy, with eager eyes, and

ardent manner, yet behind it all a pale expectancy, as if some great crisis was at hand.

"Christie, I never can forget that when all others, even I, cast Letty off, you took her in and saved her for me. What can I do to thank you for it?"

"Be my friend, and let me be hers again," she answered, too deeply moved to think of any private hope.

"Then the past, now that you know it all, does not change your heart to us?"

"It only makes you the dearer."

"And if I asked you to come back to the home that has been desolate to me since you went away, would you come?"

"Gladly, David."

"And if I dared to say I loved you?"

She only looked at him with a quick rising light and warmth over her whole face; he stretched both arms to her, and, going to him, Christie gave her answer silently.

Lovers usually ascend straight into the seventh heaven for a time, unfortunately they cannot stay there long, the air is too

rarified, the light too brilliant, the fare too etherial, and they are forced to come down to mundane things, as larks drop from heaven's gate into their grassy nests. David was summoned from that blissful region, after a brief enjoyment of its divine delights, by Christie, who looked up from her new refuge with the abrupt question,—

"What becomes of Kitty?"

David regarded her an instant with a dazed expression, for she had been speaking that delightful language of lips and eyes which lovers use, and the old tongue sounded harsh to him.

"She's safe with her father, and is to marry the 'other one' next week."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Christie so fervently that David looked suddenly enlightened and infinitely amused as he said quickly,—

"What becomes of Fletcher?"

"He's safely out of the way, and I sincerely hope he'll marry some 'other one' as soon as possible."

"Christie, you were jealous of that girl."

"David, you were jealous of that man."

Then they both burst out laughing like two children, for heavy loads had been lifted off their hearts, and they were bubbling over with happiness.

"But truly, David, weren't you a little jealous of P. F.?" persisted Christie, feeling an intense desire to ask all manner of harassing questions, with the agreeable certainty that they would be fully answered.

"Desperately jealous. You were so kind, so gay, so altogether charming when with him, that I couldn't stand by and see it, so I kept away. Why were you never so to me?"

"Because you never showed you cared for me as he did. But it was wrong in me to do it, and I repent of it heartily, for it hurt him more than I thought it would when the experiment failed. I truly tried to love him, but I couldn't."

"Yet he had so much to offer, and could give you all you most enjoy. It's very singular that you failed, and preferred a poor old fellow like me," said David, beaming at her like a beatified man.

"I do love luxury and pleasure, but I love independence more. I'm happier poking in the dirt with you than driving in a fine carriage with that piece of elegance; prouder of being your wife than his; and none of the costly things he offered me were half so precious in my sight as your little nosegays, now mouldering away in my treasure-box up-stairs. Why, Davy, I've longed more intensely for the right to push up that curly lock that is always tumbling into your eyes than for Philip's whole fortune! *May* I do it now?"

"You may," and Christie did it with a tender satisfaction that made David love her the more, though he laughed like a boy at the womanly whim.

"And so you thought I cared for Kitty?" he said presently, taking his turn at the new game.

"How could I help it when she was so young and pretty, and fond of you?"

"Was she?" innocently.

"Didn't you see it? How blind men are!"

"Not always."

"David, did you see that *I* cared for you?"

asked Christie, turning crimson under the significant glance he gave her.

"I wish I had! I confess I once or twice fancied that I caught faint glimpses of bliss round the corner as it were; but before I could decide the glimpses vanished, and I was very sure I was a conceited coxcomb to think it for a moment. It was very hard, and yet I was glad."

"Glad!"

"Yes, because I had made a sort of vow that I would never love or marry, as a punishment for my cruelty to Letty."

"That was wrong, David."

"I see it now; but it was not hard to keep the vow till you came, and you see I've broken it without a shadow of regret to-night."

"You might have done it months ago, and saved me so much woe if you had not been a dear, modest, morbidly conscientious bat," sighed Christie, pleased and proud to learn her power, yet sorry for the long delay.

"Thank you, love. You see I didn't find out why I liked my friend so well till I lost her. I had just begun to feel that you were

very dear, for after that birthday you were like an angel in the house, Christie—when you changed all at once, and I thought you suspected me and wished to show that you didn't like it. Your running away when Kitty came confirmed my belief; then in came that—would you mind if I said—confounded Fletcher?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, as he didn't win, I won't be hard on him, but I gave up then, and had a tough time of it; especially that first night when this splendid lover appeared and received such a kind welcome."

Christie saw the strong hand that lay on David's knee clenched slowly as he knit his brows with a grim look, plainly showing that he was not, what she was inclined to think him, a perfect saint.

"Oh, my heart! and there I was loving you so dearly all the time, and you wouldn't see or speak, or understand, but went away, and left me to torment all three of us!" cried Christie, with a tragic gesture.

"My dearest girl, did you ever know a man

in love do, say, or think the right thing at the right time? I never did," said David, so penitently that she forgave him on the spot.

"Never mind, dear. It has taught us the worth of love, and perhaps we are the better for the seeming waste of precious time. Now I've not only got you, but Letty also, and your mother is mine in very truth. Ah, how rich I am!"

"But I thought it was all over with me when I found Letty, because, seeing no more of Fletcher, I had ventured to hope a little; and when she came back to me, I knew my home must be hers, yet feared you would refuse to share it if you knew all. You are very proud, and the purest-hearted woman I ever knew."

"And if I had refused, you would have let me go and held fast to Letty?"

"Yes, for I owe everything to her."

"You should have known me better, Davy. But I don't refuse, and there is no need to choose between us."

"No, thank heaven, and you, my Christie!

Imagine what I felt when Letty told me all you had been to her. If anything could make me love you more than I now do, it would be that. No, don't hide your face; I like to see it blush, and smile, and turn to me confidingly, as it has not done all these long months."

"Did Letty tell you what she had been to me?" asked Christie, looking more like a rose than ever Kitty did.

"She told me everything, and wished me to tell you *all* her story, even the saddest part. I'd better do it now before you meet her."

He paused, as if the tale was hard to tell; but Christie put her hand upon his lips, saying softly,—

"Never tell it; let her past be as sacred as if she were dead. She was my friend when I had no other, she is my dear sister now, and nothing can ever change the love between us."

If she had thought David's face beautiful with gratitude when he told the happier portions of that little tale, she found it doubly so when she spared him the recital of its darkest

chapter and bade him "leave the rest to silence."

"Now you will come home? Mother wants you, Letty longs for you, and I have got and mean to keep you all my life, God willing."

"I'd better die to-night and make a blessed end, for so much happiness is hardly possible in a world of woe," answered Christie to that fervent invitation.

"We shall be married very soon, Mrs. Sterling, Junior, take a wedding trip to any part of the world you like, and our honeymoon will last for ever," said David, soaring away into the future with sublime disregard of obstacles.

Before Christie could get her breath after this somewhat startling announcement, Mr. Power appeared, took in the situation at a glance, gave them a smile that was a benediction, and said heartily, as he offered a hand to each,—

"Now I am satisfied! I've watched and waited patiently, and after many tribulations you have found each other in good time;"

then, with a significant glance at Christie, he added,—

"But David is no 'hero,' you know."

She remembered the chat in the strawberry bed, laughed, and coloured brightly as she answered, with her hand trustfully in David's, her eyes full of loving pride and reverence lifted to his face,—

"I've seen both sides of the medal now, and found it 'sterling gold.' Hero or not, I'm content, for though he 'loves his mother much,' there is room in his heart for me too; his 'old books' have given him something better than learning, and he has convinced me that 'double flowers' *are* the loveliest and best."

## CHAPTER VII.

### MUSTERED IN.

CHRISTIE'S return was a very happy one, and could not well be otherwise with a mother, sister, and lover to welcome her back. Her meeting with Letty was indescribably tender, and the days that followed were pretty equally divided between Letty and her brother, in nursing the one and loving the other. There was no cloud now in Christie's sky, and all the world seemed in bloom. But even while she enjoyed every hour of life, and begrudged those given to sleep, she felt as if the dream was too beautiful to last, and often said,—

"Something will happen; such perfect happiness is not possible for long."

"Then let us make the most of it," David

would reply, wisely bent on getting his honey while he could, and not borrowing trouble for the morrow.

So Christie turned a deaf ear to her "prophetic soul," and gave herself up to the blissful holiday that had come at last. Spring never seemed so early or so fair before, and even when March winds were howling outside, she "poked in the dirt" with David in the greenhouse, put up the curly lock as often as she liked, and told him she loved him a dozen times a day; not in words, but in silent ways that touched him to the heart and made his future look so bright he hardly dared believe in it.

A happier man it would have been difficult to find just then; all his burdens seemed to have fallen off, and his spirits rose again with an elasticity which surprised even those who knew him best. Christie often stopped to watch and wonder if the blithe young man who went whistling and singing about the house, often stopping to kiss somebody, to joke, or to exclaim, with a beaming face like a child at a party, "Isn't everything beautiful!"

could be the sober, steady old David who plodded to and fro with his broad shoulders a little bent, and the absent look in his eyes that told of thoughts above or beyond the daily task.

It was good to see his mother rejoice over him with an exceeding great joy; it was better still to see Letty's eyes follow him with unspeakable love and gratitude in their soft depths; but it was best of all to see Christie marvel and exult over the discoveries she made, for though she had known David for a year, she had never seen the real man till now.

"Davy, you are a humbug!" she said one day when they were making up a bridal order in the greenhouse.

"I told you so, but you wouldn't see it," he answered, using long-stemmed rose-buds with as prodigal a hand as if the wedding was to be his own.

"I thought I was going to marry a quiet, studious, steady-going man, and here I find myself engaged to a romantic youth who flies about in the most undignified manner, em-

braces people behind doors, sings opera airs—very much out of tune, by the way—and conducts himself more like an infatuated Claude Melnotte than a respectable man on the awful verge of matrimony. Nothing can surprise me now; I'm prepared for anything, even the sight of my Quakerish lover dancing a jig."

"Just what I've been longing to do! Come and take a turn; it will do you good," and, to Christie's utter amazement, David caught her round the waist and waltzed her down the boarded walk with a speed and skill that caused less havock among the flower pots than one would imagine, and seemed to delight the plants, who rustled and nodded as if applauding the dance of the finest double flower that had blossomed in their midst.

"I can't help it, Christie," he said, when he had landed her, breathless and laughing, at the other end, "I feel like a boy out of school, or rather a man out of prison, and *must* enjoy my liberty in some way. I'm not a talker, you know, and as the laws of gravitation forbid my soaring aloft anywhere,

I can only express my joyfully uplifted state of mind by 'prancing,' as you call it. Never mind dignity, let's be happy, and by and by I'll sober down."

"I don't want you to, I love to see you so young and happy, only you are not the old David, and I've got to get acquainted with the new one."

"I hope you'll like him better than the frost-bitten 'old David' you first knew, and were kind enough to love. Mother says I've gone back to the time before we lost Letty, and I sometimes feel as if I had. In that case you will find me a proud, impetuous, ambitious fellow, Christie, and how will that suit?"

"Excellently; I like pride of your sort; impetuosity becomes you, for you have learned to control it, if need be, and the ambition is best of all. I always wondered at your want of it, and longed to stir you up, for you did not seem the sort of man to be contented with mere creature comforts when there are so many fine things men may do. What shall you choose, Davy?"

"I shall wait for time to show me. The sap is all astir in me, and I am ready for my chance. I don't know what it is, but I feel very sure that some work will be given me into which I can put my whole heart and soul and strength. I spoilt my first chance, but I know I shall have another, and, whatever it is, I am ready to do my best, and live or die for it as God wills."

"So am I," answered Christie, with a voice as earnest and a face as full of hopeful resolution as his own.

Then they went back to their work, little dreaming, as they tied roses and twined smilax wreaths, how near that other chance was, how soon they were to be called upon to keep their promise, and how well each was to perform the part given them in life and death.

The gun fired one April morning at Fort Sumter told many men like David what their work was to be, and showed many women like Christie a new right to claim and bravely prove their fitness to possess.

No need to report the story of the war begun that day; it has been so often told that

it will only be touched upon here as one of the experiences of Christie's life, an experience which did for her what it did for all who took a part in it and loyally did their best.

The North woke up from its prosperous lethargy and began to stir with the ominous hum of bees when rude hands shake the hive. Rich and poor were proud to prove that they loved liberty better than their money or their lives, and the descendants of the brave old Puritans were worthy of their race. Many said, "It will soon be over," but the wise men, who had warned in vain, shook their heads, as that first disastrous summer showed that the time for compromise was past, and the stern reckoning day of eternal justice was at hand.

To no home in the land did the great trouble bring a more sudden change than the little cottage in the lane. All its happy peace was broken; excitement and anxiety, grief and indignation, banished the sweet home joys and darkened the future that had seemed so clear. David was sober enough now, and went about his work with a grim set to his lips

and a spark in his eyes that made the three women look at one another pale with unspoken apprehension.

As they sat together picking lint or rolling bandages, while David read aloud some dismal tale of a lost battle that chilled their blood and made their hearts ache with pity, each woman, listening to the voice that stirred her like martial music, said within herself, "Sooner or later he will go, and I have no right to keep him." Each tried to be ready to make her sacrifice bravely when the time came, and each prayed that it might not be required of her.

David said little; but they knew by the way he neglected his garden and worked for the soldiers, that his heart was in the war. Day after day he left Christie and his sister to fill the orders that came so often now for flowers to lay on the grave of some dear, dead boy brought home to his mother in a shroud. Day after day he hurried away to help Mr. Power in the sanitary work that soon claimed all hearts and hands; and day after day he came home with what Christie

called the "heroic look" more plainly written on his face. All that first summer, so short and strange, all that first winter, so long and hard to those who went and those who stayed, David worked and waited, and the women waxed strong in the new atmosphere of self-sacrifice which pervaded the air, bringing out the sturdy virtues of the North.

"How terrible! Oh, when will it be over?" sighed Letty one day, after hearing a long list of the dead and wounded in one of the great battles of that second summer.

"Never till we have beaten!" cried David, throwing down the paper, and walking about the room with his head up like a war-horse who smells powder. "It *is* terrible, and yet glorious! I thank heaven I live to see this great wrong righted, and only wish I could do my share like a man!"

"That is natural; but there are plenty of men who have fewer ties than you, who can fight better, and whose places are easier to fill than yours if they die," said Christie hastily.

"But the men who have most to lose fight

best, they say; and to my thinking a soldier needs a principle as well as a weapon, if he is to do real service."

"As the only son of a widow you can't be drafted, that's one comfort," said Letty, who could not bear to give up the brother lost to her for so many years.

"I should not wait for that, and I know mother would give her widow's mite if she saw that it was needed."

"Yes, Davy," the soft, old voice answered steadily; but the feeble hand closed instinctively on the arm of the one son who was so dear to her.

David held it close in both of his, saying gratefully, "Thank you, mother," then fixing his eyes on the younger, yet not dearer women, he added, with a ring in his voice that made their hearts answer with a prompt "Ay, ay!" in spite of love or fear,—

"Now listen, you dear souls, and understand that if I do this thing, I shall not do it hastily, nor without counting well the cost. My first and most natural impulse was to go in the beginning; but I stayed for your sakes.

I saw I was not really needed; I thought the war would soon be over, and those who went there would do the work. You see how mistaken we were, and God only knows when the end will come. The boys—bless their brave hearts!—have done nobly, but older men are needed now. We cannot sacrifice all the gallant lads, and we, who have more to lose than they, must take our turn and try to do as well. You own this, I see it in your faces; then don't hold me back when the time comes for me to go. I *must* do my part, however small it is, or I shall never feel as if I deserved the love you give me. You will let me go, I am sure, and not regret that I did what seemed to me a solemn duty, leaving the consequences to the Lord!"

"Yes, David," sister and sweetheart answered bravely, forgetting, in the fervour of the moment, what heavy consequences God might see fit to send.

"Good! I knew my Spartans would be ready, and I won't disgrace them. I've waited more than a year, and done what I could. But all the while I felt that

I was going to get a chance at the hard work, and I've been preparing for it. Bennet will take the garden and greenhouse off my hands this autumn, for a year or longer, if I like. He's a kind, neighbourly man, and his boy will take my place about the house, and protect you faithfully. Mr. Power cannot be spared to go as chaplain, though he longs to desperately; so he is near in case of need; and with your two devoted daughters near you, mother, I surely can be spared for a little while."

"Only one daughter near her, David, I shall enlist when you do," said Christie resolutely.

"You mean it?"

"I mean it as honestly as you do. I knew you would go; I saw you getting ready, and I made up my mind to follow. I too have prepared for it, and even spoken to Mrs. Amory. She has gone as matron of a hospital, and promised to find a place for me when I was ready. The day you enlist I shall write and tell her I *am* ready."

There was fire in Christie's eyes, and a

flush on her cheek now, as she stood up with the look of a woman bent on doing well her part. David caught her hands in his, regardless of the ominous bandages they held, and said, with tender admiration and reproach in his voice,—

"You wouldn't marry me when I asked you this summer, fearing you would be a burden to me; but now you want to share hardship and danger with me, and support me by the knowledge of your nearness. Dear, ought I to let you do it?"

"You will let me, and in return I will marry you whenever you ask me," answered Christie, sealing the promise with a kiss that silenced David.

He had been anxious to be married long ago; but when he asked Mr. Power to come and do it a month after his engagement, that wise friend said to them,—

"I don't advise it yet. You have tried and proved one another as friends, now try and prove one another as lovers; then, if you feel that all is safe and happy, you will be ready for the greatest of the

three experiments, and then in God's name marry."

"We will," they said; and for a year had been content, studying one another, finding much to love, and something to learn in the art of bearing and forbearing.

David had begun to think they had waited long enough; but Christie still delayed, fearing she was not worthy yet, and secretly afflicted by the thought of her poverty. She had so little to give in return for all she received, that it troubled her; and she was sometimes tempted to ask Uncle Enos for a modest marriage portion. She never had yet, and now resolved to ask nothing, but to earn her blessing by doing her share in the great work.

"I shall remember that!" was all David answered to that last promise of hers, and three months later he took her at her word.

For a week or two they went on in the old way; Christie did her housework with her head full of new plans, read books on nursing, made gruel, plasters, and poultices, till Mrs. Sterling pronounced her perfect, and

dreamed dreams of a happy time to come when peace had come, and David was safe at home, with all the stars and bars a man could win without dying for them.

David set things in order, conferred with Bennet, petted his womankind, and then hurried away to pack boxes of stores, visit camps, and watch departing regiments with a daily increasing certainty that his time had come.

One late September day he went slowly home, and, seeing Christie in the garden, joined her, helped her finish matting up some delicate shrubs, put by the tools, and, when all was done, said, with unusual gentleness,—

"Come and walk a little in the lane."

She put her arm in his, and answered quickly,—

"You've something to tell me; I see it in your face."

"Yes, dear, I must go."

"Yes, David."

"And you?"

"I go too."

"Yes, Christie."

That was all; she did not offer to detain him now, he did not deny her right to follow. They looked each other bravely in the face a moment, seeing, acknowledging the duty and the danger, yet ready to do the one and lose the other, since they went together. Then shoulder to shoulder, as if already mustered in, these faithful comrades marched to and fro, planning their campaign.

Next evening, as Mrs. Sterling sat musing in the twilight, a tall man in army blue entered quietly, stood watching the tranquil figure for a moment, then went and knelt down beside it, saying, with a most unsoldierly choke in the voice,—

"I've done it, mother; tell me you're not sorry."

But the little Quaker cap went down on the broad shoulder, and the only answer he heard was a sob that stirred the soft folds over the tender old heart that clung so closely to the son who had lived for her so long. All that happened in the twilight no one ever knew; but David received promotion for bravery in a harder battle than

any he was going to, and from his mother's breast a decoration more precious to him than the Cross of the Legion of Honour from a royal hand.

When Mr. Power presently came in, followed by the others, they found their soldier standing very erect in his old place on the rug, with the firelight gleaming on his bright buttons, and Bran staring at him with a perplexed aspect, for the uniform, cropped head, trimmed beard, and a certain lofty carriage of the head so changed his master that the sagacious beast was disturbed.

Letty clung to him a moment, then went to comfort her mother, who could not recover her tranquillity so soon. But Christie stood aloof, looking at her lover with something more than admiration in the face that kindled beautifully as she exclaimed,—

"Oh, David, you are splendid! Once I was so blind I thought you plain; but now my 'boy in blue' is the noblest-looking man I ever saw. Yes, Mr. Power, I've found my hero at last! Here he is—my knight, without reproach or fear, going out to take his

part in the grandest battle ever fought. I wouldn't keep him if I could: I'm glad and proud to have him go; and if he never should come back to me, I can bear it better for knowing that he dutifully did his best, and left the consequences to the Lord."

Then, having poured out the love, and pride, and confidence that enriched her sacrifice, she broke down and clung to him weeping, as so many clung and wept in those hard days when men and women gave their dearest, and those who prayed and waited suffered almost as much as those who fought and died.

When the deed was once done, it was astonishing what satisfaction they all took in it; how soon they got accustomed to the change, and what pride they felt in "our soldier!" The loyal frenzy fell upon the three quiet women, and they could not do too much for their country. Mrs. Sterling cut up her treasured old linen without a murmur; Letty made "comfort bags" by the dozen, put up jelly, and sewed on blue jackets with tireless industry; while Christie

proclaimed that if she had twenty lovers she would send them all, and then make preparations enough to nurse the entire party.

David meantime was in camp, getting his first taste of martial life, and not liking it any better than he thought he should. But no one heard a complaint, and he never regretted his "love among the roses," for he was one of the men who had a "principle as well as a weapon," and meant to do good service with both.

It would have taken many knapsacks to hold all the gifts showered upon him by his friends and neighbours. He accepted all that came, and furnished forth those of his company who were less honoured. Among these was Elisha Wilkins, and how he got there should be told.

Elisha had not the slightest intention of enlisting; but Mrs. Wilkins was a loyal soul, and could not rest till she had sent a substitute, since she could not go herself. Finding that Lisha showed little enthusiasm on the subject, she tried to rouse him by

patriotic appeals of various sorts. She read stirring accounts of battles, carefully omitting the dead and wounded; she turned out, baby and all, if possible, to cheer every regiment that left, and was never tired of telling Wash how she wished she could add ten years to his age, and send him off to fight for his country like a man.

But nothing seemed to rouse the supine Elisha, who chewed his quid like a placid beast of the field, and showed no sign of a proper spirit.

"Very well," said Mrs. Wilkins resolutely to herself, "ef I can't make no impression on his soul, I will on his stommick, and see how that'll work."

Which threat she carried out with such skill and force, that Lisha was effectually waked up, for he was "partial to good vittles," and Cynthy was a capital cook. Poor rations did not suit him, and he demanded why his favourite dishes were not forthcoming.

"We can't afford no nice vittles now when our men are sufferin' so—I should be ashamed

to cook em, and expect to choke tryin' to eat em. Every one is sacrificin' somethin', and we mustn't be slack in doin' our part—the Lord knows it's precious little!—and there won't be no stuffin' in this house for a consid'able spell. Ef I *could* save up to send a man to do my share of the fightin' I should be proud to do it. Anyway, I shall stint the family, and send them dear brave fellers every cent I can git without starvin' the children."

"Now, Cynthy, don't be ferce. Things will come out all right, and it ain't no use upsettin' everything and bein' so darned uncomfortable," answered Mr. Wilkins, with unusual energy.

"Yes it is, Lisha. No one has a right to be comfortable in such times as these, and *this* family ain't goin' to be ef I can help it;" and Mrs. Wilkins sat down her flat-iron with a slam which plainly told her Lisha war was declared.

He said no more, but fell a-thinking. He was not as unmoved as he seemed by the general excitement, and had felt sundry

manly impulses to "up and at 'em" when his comrades in the shop discussed the crisis with ireful brandishing of awls, and vengeful pounding of sole leather, as if the rebels were under the hammer. But the selfish, slothful little man could not make up his mind to brave hardship and danger, and fell back on his duty to his family as a reason for keeping safe at home.

But now that home was no longer comfortable, now that Cynthy had sharpened her tongue and turned "ferce," and now—hardest blow of all—that he was kept on short commons, he began to think he might as well be on the tented field, and get a little glory along with the discomfort, if that was inevitable. Nature abhors a vacuum, and when food fell short, patriotism had a chance to fill the aching void. Lisha had about made up his mind, for he knew the value of peace and quietness; and though his wife was no scold, she was the ruling power, and in his secret soul he considered her a very remarkable woman. He knew what she wanted, but was not going to be hurried for anybody, so

he still kept silent, and Mrs. Wilkins began to think she must give it up. An unexpected ally appeared, however, and the good woman took advantage of it to strike one last blow.

Lisha sat eating a late breakfast one morning, with a small son at either elbow, waiting for stray mouthfuls, and committing petty larcenies right and left, for Pa was in a brown study. Mrs. Wilkins was frying flapjacks—and though this is not considered a heroical employment, she made it so that day. This was a favourite dish of Lisha's, and she had prepared it as a bait for this cautious fish. To say that the fish rose at once and swallowed the bait, hook and all, but feebly expresses the justice done to the cakes by that long-suffering man. Waiting till he had a tempting pile of the lightest, brownest flapjacks ever seen upon his plate, and was watching an extra big bit of butter melt into the warm bosom of the upper one, with a face as benign as if some of the molasses he was trickling over them had been absorbed into his nature, Mrs. Wilkins seized the propitious moment to say impressively,—

"David Sterlin' has enlisted."

"Sho! has he, though?"

"Of course he has! any man with the spirit of a musketeer would."

"Well, he ain't got a family, you see."

"Yes, he has; his old mother, that sister home from furrin parts somewheres, and Christie jest going to be married. I should like to know who's got a harder family to leave than that?"

"Six young children is harder; if I went fifin and drummin' off, who'd take care of them I'd like to know?"

"I guess *I* could support the family if I give my mind to it;" and Mrs. Wilkins turned a flapjack with an emphasis that caused her lord to bolt a hot triangle with dangerous rapidity, for well he knew very little of *his* money went into the common purse. She never reproached him, but the fact nettled him now, and something in the tone of her voice made that sweet morsel hard to swallow.

"'Pears to me, you're in rather a hurry to be a widder, Cynthy, shovin' me off to git

shot in this kind of a way," growled Lisha, ill at ease.

"I'd rather be a brave man's widder than a coward's wife any day!" cried the rebellious Cynthy; then she relented, and softly slapped two hot cakes into his plate, adding, with her hand upon his shoulder, "Lisha, dear, I want to be proud of my husband, as other women be now-a-days; every one gives somethin', I've only got you, and I want to do my share, and do it hearty."

She went back to her work, and Mr. Wilkins sat thoughtfully stroking the curly heads beside him, while the boys ravaged his plate, with no reproof, but a half-audible, "My little chaps, my little chaps!"

She thought she had got him, and she smiled to herself, even while a great tear sputtered on the griddle at those last words of his.

Imagine her dismay when, having consumed the bait, her fish gave signs of breaking the line and escaping after all; for Mr. Wilkins pushed back his chair, and said slowly, as he filled his pipe,—

"I'm blest ef I can see the sense of a lot of decent men going off to be froze and starved, and blowed up, jest for them confounded niggers."

He got no farther, for his wife's patience gave out, and, leaving her cakes to burn black, she turned to him with a face glowing like her stove, and cried out,—

"Lisha, ain't you got no heart? Can you remember what Hepsey told us, and call them poor, long-sufferin' creeters names? Can you think of them wretched wives sold from their husbands; them children as dear as our'n tore from their mothers, and old folks kep' slavin' eighty long hard years with no pay, no help, no pity when they git past work? Lisha Wilkins, look at *that*, and say 'No' if you dar'st!"

Mrs. Wilkins was a homely woman, in an old calico gown, but her face, her voice, her attitude were grand as she flung wide the door of the little back bedroom and pointed with her tin spatula to the sight beyond.

Only Hepsey sitting by a bed, where lay what looked more like a shrivelled mummy

than a woman. Ah! but it was that old mother, worked and waited for so long; blind now and deaf, childish and half dead with many hardships, but safe and free at last; and, looking at her, Hepsey's black face was full of a pride, a peace and happiness more eloquent and touching than any speech or sermon ever uttered.

Mr. Wilkins had heard her story and been more affected by it than he would confess: now it came home to him with sudden force; the thought of his own mother, wife, or babies torn from him, stirred him to the heart, and the manliest emotion he had ever known caused him to cast his pipe at his feet, put on his hat with an energetic slap, and walk out of the house, wearing an expression on his usually wooden face that caused his wife to clap her hands and cry, with a triumphant voice,—

"I thought that would fetch him!"

Then she fell to work like an inspired woman; and at noon a sumptuous dinner "smoked upon the board;" the children were scrubbed till their faces shone, and the room

was as fresh and neat as any apartment could be with the penetrating perfume of burnt flapjacks still pervading the air, and three dozen ruffled nightcaps decorating the clothes-lines overhead.

"Tell me the instant minute you see Pa a comin', and I'll dish up the gravy," was Mrs. Wilkins's command as she stepped in with a dish of tea for old "Marm," as she called Hepsey's mother.

"He's a comin', Ma!" called Gursy presently.

"No, he ain't, it's a trainer," added Lizy.

"Yes, 'tis Pa! Oh, my eye, ain't he stunnin?"" cried Wash, stricken for the first time with admiration of his size.

Before Mrs. Wilkins could reply to these conflicting rumours, her husband walked in looking as martial as his hollow chest, and thin legs permitted, and, turning his cap nervously in his hands, said, half proudly, half reproachfully,—

"Now, Cynthy, *be* you satisfied?"

"Oh, my Lisha, I be! I be!" and the

inconsistent woman fell upon his buttony breast, weeping copiously.

If ever a man was praised and petted, admired and caressed, it was Elisha Wilkins that day. His wife fed him with the fat of the land, regardless of consequences; his children revolved about him with tireless curiosity and wonder; his neighbours flocked in to applaud, advise, and admire; every one treated him with a respect most grateful to his feelings; he was an object of interest, and with every hour his importance increased, so that by night he felt like a commander-in-chief, and bore himself accordingly. He had enlisted in David's regiment, which was a great comfort to his wife; for though her stout heart never failed her, it grew very heavy at times; and when Lisha was gone she often dropped a private tear over the broken pipe that always lay in its old place, and vented her emotions by sending baskets of nourishment to Private Wilkins, which caused that bandy-legged warrior to be much envied and cherished by his mates.

"I'm glad I done it; for it will make a man

of Lisha; and if I've sent him to his death, God knows he'll be fitter to die than if he stayed here idlin' his life away."

Then the good soul openly shouldered the burden she had borne so long in secret, and bravely trudged on alone.

"Another great battle!" screamed the excited news-boys in the streets. "Another great battle!" read Letty in the cottage parlour. "Another great battle!" cried David, coming in with the war-horse expression on his face a month or two after he enlisted.

The women dropped their work to look and listen, for his visits were few and short, and every instant was precious. When the first greetings were over, David stood silent an instant, and a sudden mist came over his eyes as he glanced from one beloved face to another, then he threw back his head with the old impatient gesture, squared his shoulders, and said, in a loud, cheerful voice, with a suspicious undertone of emotion in it, however,—

"My precious people, I've got something to tell you: are you ready?"

They knew what it was without a word.

Mrs. Sterling clasped her hands and bowed her head, Letty turned pale and went to her mother, but Christie's eyes kindled as she stood up and answered, with a salute,—

"Ready, my general."

"We are ordered off at once, and go at four this afternoon. I've got a three hours' leave to say good-bye in. Now let's be brave and enjoy every minute of it."

"We will. What can I do for you, Davy?" asked Christie, wonderfully supported by the thought that she was going too.

"Keep your promise, dear," he answered, while the warlike expression changed to one of infinite tenderness.

"What promise?"

"This;" and he held out his hand with a little paper in it. She saw it was a marriage licence, and on it lay a wedding-ring. She did not hesitate an instant, but laid her own hand in his, and answered, with her heart in her face,—

"I'll keep it, David."

"I knew you would!" then, holding her close, he said, in a tone that made it very hard

for her to keep steady, as she had vowed she would do to the last, "I know it is much to ask, but I want to feel that you are mine before I go. Not only that, but it will be a help and protection to you, dear, when you follow. As a married woman you will get on better; as my wife you will be allowed to come to me if I need you; and as my——" he stopped there, for he could not add, "as my widow you will have my pension to support you."

She understood, put both arms about his neck, as if to keep him safe, and whispered fervently,—

"Nothing can part us any more, not even death, for love like ours will last for ever."

"Then you are quite willing to try the third and last experiment?"

"Glad and proud to do it."

"With no doubt, no fear, to mar your consent?"

"Not one, David."

"God bless you, Christie!"

Then they stood quite still for a time, and in the silence the two hearts talked together

in the sweet and solemn language no tongue can utter. Presently David said regretfully,—

"I meant it should be so different. I always planned that we'd be married some bright summer day, with many friends about us, then take a happy little journey somewhere together, and come back to settle down at home in the dear old way. Now it's all so hurried, sorrowful, and strange. A dull November day, no friends but Mr. Power, who will be here soon, no journey but my march to Washington alone, and no happy coming home together in this world, perhaps! Can you bear it, love?"

"Have no fear for me, I feel as if I could bear anything just now, for I've got into a heroic mood, and I mean to keep so as long as I can. I've always wanted to live in stirring times, to have a part in great deeds, to sacrifice and suffer something for a principle or a person, and now I have my wish. I like it, David; it's a grand time to live, a splendid chance to do and suffer, and I want to be in it heart and soul, and earn a little of the glory or the martyrdom that will come in the end.

Surely I shall if I give you and myself to the cause, and I do it gladly, though I know that my heart has got to ache as it never ached yet, when my courage fails, as it will by and by, and my selfish soul counts the cost of my offering when the excitement is over. Help me to be brave and strong; don't let me complain and regret, but show me what lies beyond, and teach me to believe that simply doing the right is reward and happiness enough."

Christie was lifted out of herself for the moment, and looked inspired by the high mood which was but the beginning of a nobler life for her. David caught the exaltation, and gave no further thought to anything but the duty of the hour, finding himself stronger and braver for that long look into the illuminated face of the woman he loved.

"I'll try," was all his answer to her appeal; then proved that he meant it by adding, with his lips against her cheek, "I must go to mother and Letty. We leave them behind, and they must be comforted."

He went, and Christie vanished to make ready for her wedding, conscious, in spite of

her exalted state of mind, that everything *was* very hurried, sad, and strange, and very different from the happy day she had so often planned.

"No matter, we are 'well on't for love,' and that is all we really need," she thought, recalling, with a smile, Mrs. Wilkins' advice.

"David sends you these, dear. Can I help in any way?" asked Letty, coming in with a cluster of lovely white roses in her hand and a world of affection in her eyes.

"I thought he'd give me violets;" and a shadow came over Christie's face.

"But they are mourning flowers, you know."

"Not to me. The roses are, for they remind me of poor Helen, and the first work I did with David was arranging flowers like these for a dead baby's little coffin."

"My dearest Christie, don't be superstitious; all brides wear roses, and Davy thought you'd like them," said Letty, troubled at her words.

"Then I'll wear them, and I won't have ancies if I can help it. But I think few

brides dress with a braver, happier heart than mine, though I do choose a sober wedding-gown," answered Christie, smiling again as she took from a half-packed trunk her new hospital suit of soft, grey, woollen stuff.

"Won't you wear the pretty silvery silk we like so well?" asked Letty timidly, for something in Christie's face and manner impressed her very much.

"No, I will be married in my uniform, as David is," answered the bride, with a look Letty long remembered.

"Mr. Power has come," she said softly, a few minutes later, with an anxious glance at the clock.

"Go, dear, I'll come directly. But first"—and Christie held her friend close a moment, kissed her tenderly, and whispered in a broken voice—"remember, I don't take his heart from you, I only share it with my sister and my mother."

"I'm glad to give him to you, Christie, for now I feel as if I had partly paid the great debt I've owed you so long," answered Letty through her tears.

Then she went away, and Christie soon followed, looking very like a Quaker bride in her grey gown, with no ornament but delicate frills at neck and wrist and the roses in her bosom.

"No bridal white, dear?" said David, going to her.

"Only this," and she touched the flowers, adding, with her hand on the blue coat-sleeve that embraced her, "I want to consecrate my uniform as you do yours, by being married in it. Isn't it fitter for a soldier's wife than lace and silk at such a time as this?"

"Much fitter. I like it, and I find you beautiful, my Christie," whispered David, as she put one of her roses in his button-hole.

"Then I'm satisfied."

"Mr. Power is waiting; are you ready?"

"Quite ready."

Then they were married, with Letty and her mother standing beside them, Bennet and his wife dimly visible in the doorway, and poor Bran at his master's feet, looking up with wistful eyes, half human in the anxious affection they expressed.

Christie never forgot that service, so simple, sweet, and solemn; nor the look her husband gave her at the end, when he kissed her on lips and forehead, saying fervently, "God bless my wife!"

A tender little scene followed that can better be imagined than described, then Mr. Power said cheerily,—

"One hour more is all you have, so make the most of it, dearly beloved. You young folks, take a wedding trip to the greenhouse, while we see how well we can get on without you."

David and Christie went smiling away together, and if they shed any tears over their brief happiness, no one saw them but the flowers, and they loyally kept the secret folded up in their tender hearts.

Mr. Power cheered the old lady, while Letty, always glad to serve, made ready the last meal David might ever take at home.

A very simple little marriage feast, but more love, good-will, and tender wishes adorned the plain table than is often found at wedding-breakfasts; and better than any speech or

song was Letty's broken whisper, as she folded her arms round David's empty chair, when no one saw her, "God bless, and keep, and bring him back to us."

How time went that day! The inexorable clock *would* strike twelve so soon, and then the minutes flew till one was at hand, and the last words were still half said, the last good-byes still unuttered.

"I *must* go!" cried David, with a sort of desperation, as Letty clung to one arm, Christie to the other.

"I shall see you soon; good-bye, my husband," whispered Christie, setting him free.

"Give the last kiss to mother," added Letty, following her example, and in another minute David was gone.

At the turn of the lane, he looked back and swung his cap; all waved their hands to him, and then he marched away to the great work before him, leaving those loving hearts to ask the unanswerable question, "How will he come home?"

Christie was going to town to see the regi-

ment off, and soon followed with Mr. Power. They went early to a certain favourable spot, and there found Mrs. Wilkins, with her entire family perched upon a fence, on the spikes of which they impaled themselves at intervals, and had to be plucked off by the stout girl engaged to assist in this memorable expedition.

"Yes, Lisha's goin', and I was bound he should see every one of his blessed children the last thing, ef I took 'em all on my back. He knows where to look, and he's a-goin' to see seven cheerful faces as he goes by. Time enough to cry byme-by; so set stiddy, boys, and cheer loud when you see pa," said Mrs. Wilkins, fanning her hot face, and utterly forgetting her cherished bonnet in the excitement of the moment.

"I hear drums! They're comin'!" cried Wash, after a long half-hour's waiting had nearly driven him frantic.

The two younger boys immediately tumbled off the fence, and were with difficulty restored to their perches. Gusty began to cry, Ann Elizy to wave a minute red cotton handker-

chief, and Adelaide to kick delightedly in her mother's arms.

"Jane Carter, take this child for massy sake; my legs do tremble so, I can't h'ist her another minute. Hold on to me behind, somebody, for I *must* see ef I do pitch into the gutter," cried Mrs. Wilkins, with a gasp, as she wiped her eyes on her shawl, clutched the railing, and stood ready to cheer bravely when her conquering hero came.

Wash had heard drums every five minutes since he arrived, but this time he was right, and began to cheer the instant a red cockade appeared at the other end of the long street.

It was a different scene now than in the first enthusiastic, hopeful days. Young men and ardent boys filled the ranks then, brave by instinct, burning with loyal zeal, and blissfully ignorant of all that lay before them.

Now the blue coats were worn by mature men, some grey, all grave and resolute; husbands and fathers, with the memory of wives and children tugging at their heart-strings; homes left desolate behind them, and before them the grim certainty of danger, hardship,

and perhaps a captivity worse than death. Little of the glamour of romance about the war now; they saw what it was, a long, hard task; and here were the men to do it well.

Even the lookers-on were different now. Once all was wild enthusiasm and glad uproar; now men's lips were set, and women's smileless, even as they cheered; fewer handkerchiefs whitened the air, for wet eyes needed them; and sudden lulls, almost solemn in their stillness, followed the acclamations of the crowd. All watched with quickened breath and proud souls that living wave, blue below, and bright with a steely glitter above, as it flowed down the street and away to join the sea of dauntless hearts that for months had rolled up against the South, and ebbed back reddened with the blood of men like these.

As the inspiring music, the grand tramp drew near, Christie felt the old thrill, and longed to fall in and follow the flag anywhere. Then she saw David, and the regiment became one man to her. He was pale, but his eyes shone, and his whole face expressed that two of the best and bravest emotions of a man,

love and loyalty, were at their height as he gave his new-made wife a long, lingering look, that seemed to say—

> "Dear, I could not love thee half so much,
> Loved I not honour more."

Christie smiled and waved her hand to him, showed him his wedding roses still on her breast, and bore up as gallantly as he, resolved that his last impression of her should be a cheerful one. But when it was all over, and nothing remained but the trampled street, the hurrying crowd, the bleak November sky, when Mrs. Wilkins sat sobbing on the steps like Niobe, with her children scattered about her, then Christie's heart gave way, and she hid her face on Mr. Power's shoulder for a moment, all her ardour quenched in tears, as she cried within herself,—

"No, I could *not* bear it if I was not going too!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE COLONEL.

TEN years earlier Christie made her début as an Amazon; now she had a braver part to play on a larger stage, with a nation for audience, martial music and the boom of cannon for orchestra; the glare of battle-fields was the "red-light;" danger, disease, and death the foes she was to contend against; and the troupe she led, not timid girls, but high-hearted women who fought gallantly till the "demon" lay dead, and sang their song of exultation with bleeding hearts, for this great spectacle was a dire tragedy to them.

Christie followed David in a week, and soon proved herself so capable that Mrs. Amory rapidly promoted her from one impor-

tant post to another, and bestowed upon her the only honours left the women, hard work, responsibility, and the gratitude of many men.

"You are a treasure, my dear, for you can turn your hand to anything, and do well whatever you undertake. So many come with plenty of good-will, but not a particle of practical ability, and are offended because I decline their help. The boys don't want to be cried over, or have their brows 'everlastingly swabbed,' as old Watkins calls it: they want to be well fed and nursed, and cheered up with creature comforts. Your nice beef-tea and cheery ways are worth oceans of tears and cartloads of tracts."

Mrs. Amory said this, as Christie stood waiting while she wrote an order for some extra delicacy for a very sick patient. Mrs. Sterling, Junr., certainly did looklike an efficient nurse, who thought more of "the boys" than of herself; for one hand bore a pitcher of gruel, the other a bag of oranges, clean shirts hung over the right arm, a rubber cushion under the left, and every pocket in

the big apron was full of bottles and bandages, papers and letters.

"I never discovered what an accomplished woman I was till I came here," answered Christie, laughing, "I'm getting vain with so much praise; but I like it immensely, and never was so pleased in my life as I was yesterday, when Dr. Harvey came for me to take care of poor Dunbar, because no one else could manage him."

"It's your firm yet pitiful way the men like so well. I can't describe it better than in Big Ben's words, 'Mis Sterlin' is the nuss for me, marm. She takes care of me as ef she was my own mother, and it's a comfort jest to see her round.' It's a gift, my dear, and you may thank heaven you have got it, for it works wonders in a place like this."

"I only treat the poor fellows as I would have other women treat my David if he should be in their care. He may be any hour, you know."

"And my boys, God keep them!"

The pen lay idle, and the gruel cooled as

young wife and grey-haired mother forgot their duty for a moment in tender thoughts of the absent. Only a moment, for in came an attendant with a troubled face, and an important young surgeon, with the well-worn little case under his arm.

"Bartlett's dying, marm; could you come and see to him?" said the man to Mrs. Amory. "We have got to amputate Porter's arm this morning, and he won't consent unless you are with him. You'll come, of course," added the surgeon to Christie, having tried and found her a woman with no "confounded nerves" to impair her usefulness.

So matron and nurse go back to their duty, and dying Bartlett and suffering Porter are all the more tenderly served for that wasted minute.

Like David, Christie had enlisted for the war, and in the two years that followed she saw all sorts of service; for Mrs. Amory had influence, and her right-hand woman, after a few months' apprenticeship, was ready for any post. The grey gown and comforting

face were known in many hospitals, seen on crowded transports, among the ambulances at the front, invalid cars, relief tents, and food depôts up and down the land, and many men went out of life like tired children, holding the hand that did its work so well.

David, meanwhile, was doing his part manfully, not only in some of the great battles of those years, but among the hardships, temptations, and sacrifices of a soldier's life. Spite of his Quaker ancestors, he was a good fighter, and, better still, a magnanimous enemy, hating slavery, but not the slaveholder, and often spared the master while he saved the chattel. He was soon promoted, and might have risen rapidly, but was content to remain captain of his company, for his men loved him, and he was prouder of his influence over them than of any decoration he could win.

His was the sort of courage that keeps a man faithful to death; and though he made no brilliant charge, uttered few protestations of loyalty, and was never heard to "damn the rebs," his comrades felt that his brave

example had often kept them steady till a forlorn hope turned into a victory, knew that all the wealth of the world could not bribe him from his duty, and learned of him to respect an enemy as brave and less fortunate than themselves. A noble nature soon takes its proper rank, and exerts its purifying influence, and Private Sterling won confidence, affection, and respect long before promotion came; for though he had tended his flowers like a woman, and loved his books like a student, he now proved that he could also do his duty and keep his honour stainless as a soldier and a gentleman.

He and Christie met as often as the one could get a brief furlough or the other be spared from hospital duty, but when these meetings did come, they were wonderfully beautiful and rich, for into them was distilled a concentration of the love, happiness, and communion which many men and women only know through years of wedded life.

Christie liked romance, and now she had it with a very sombre reality to give it an added charm. No Juliet ever welcomed her Romeo

more joyfully than she welcomed David when he paid her a flying visit unexpectedly; no Bayard ever had a more devoted lady in his tent than David, when his wife came through every obstacle to bring him comforts, or to nurse the few wounds he received. Love-letters, written beside watch-fires and sick-beds, flew to and fro like carrier doves with wondrous speed, and nowhere in all the brave and busy land was there a fonder pair than this, although their honeymoon was spent apart in camp and hospital, and well they knew that there might never be for them a happy going home together.

In her wanderings to and fro, Christie not only made many new friends, but met some old ones; and among these one whose unexpected appearance much surprised and touched her.

She was "scrabbling" eggs in a tin basin on board a crowded transport going up the river, with the echoes of a battle dying away behind her, and before her the prospect of passing the next day on a wharf, serving out food to the wounded in an easterly storm.

"Oh, Mrs. Sterling, do go up and see what's to be done! We are all full below, and more poor fellows are lying about on deck in a dreadful state. I'll take your place here, but I can't stand that any longer," said one of her aides, coming in heart-sick and exhausted by the ghastly sights and terrible confusion of the day.

"I'll go; keep scrabbling while the eggs last, then knock out the head of that barrel and make gruel till I pass the word to stop."

Forgetting her bonnet, and tying the ends of her shawl behind her, Christie caught up a bottle of brandy and a canteen of water, and ran on deck. There a sight to daunt most any woman met her eyes; for all about her, so thick that she could hardly step without treading on them, lay the sad wrecks of men; some moaning for help, some silent with set white faces turned up to the grey sky; all shelterless from the cold wind that blew, and the fog rising from the river. Surgeons and nurses were doing their best; but the boat was loaded, and greater suffering reigned below.

"Heaven help us all!" sighed Christie, and then she fell to work.

Bottle and canteen were both nearly empty by the time she came to the end of the long line, where lay a silent figure with a hidden face. "Poor fellow, is he dead?" said Christie, kneeling down to lift a corner of the blanket lent by a neighbour.

A familiar face looked up at her, and a well remembered voice said courteously but feebly,

"Thanks, not yet. Excuse my left hand. I'm very glad to see you."

"Mr. Fletcher, can it be you!" she cried, looking at him with pitiful amazement. Well she might ask, for anything more unlike his former self can hardly be imagined. Unshaven, haggard, and begrimed with powder, mud to the knees, coat half on, and, worst of all, the right arm gone, there lay the "piece of elegance" she had known, and answered with a smile she never saw before,—

"All that's left of me, and very much at your service; I must apologize for the dirt, but I've laid in a mud-puddle for two days; and though it was much easier than a board, it doesn't improve one's appearance.

"What can I do for you? Where can I put you? I can't bear to see you here!" said Christie, much afflicted by the spectacle before her.

"Why not? we are all alike when it comes to this pass. I shal l do very well if I might trouble you for a draught of water."

She poured her last drop into his parched mouth, and hurried off for more. She was detained by the way, and, when she returned, fancied he was asleep, but soon discovered that he had fainted quietly away, utterly spent with two days of hunger, suffering, and exposure. He was himself again directly, and lay contentedly looking up at her as she fed him with hot soup, longing to talk, but refusing to listen to a word till he was refreshed.

"That's very nice," he said gratefully, as he finished, adding, with a pathetic sort of gaiety, as he groped about with his one hand, "I don't expect napkins, but I should like a handkerchief. They took my coat off when they did my arm, and the gentleman who

kindly lent me this doesn't seem to have possessed such an article."

Christie wiped his lips with the clean towel at her side, and smiled, as she did it, at the idea of Mr. Fletcher's praising burnt soup, and her feeding him like a baby out of a tin cup.

"I think it would comfort you if I washed your face; can you bear to have it done?" she asked.

"If you can bear to do it," he answered, with an apologetic look, evidently troubled at receiving such services from her.

Yet as her hands moved gently about his face, he shut his eyes, and there was a little quiver of the lips now and then, as if he was remembering a time when he had hoped to have her near him in a tenderer capacity than that of nurse. She guessed the thought, and tried to banish it by saying cheerfully as she finished,—

"There, you look more like yourself after that. Now the hands."

"Fortunately for you there is but one," and he rather reluctantly surrendered a very dirty member.

"Forgive me, I forgot! It is a brave hand, and I am proud to wash it."

"How do you know that?" he asked, surprised at her little burst of enthusiasm; for as she spoke she pressed the grimy hand in both her own.

"While I was recovering you from your faint, that man over there informed me that you were his colonel, that you 'fit like a tiger,' and when your right arm was disabled, you took your sword in the left, and cheered them on as if you 'were bound to beat the whole rebel army.'"

"That's Drake's story," and Mr. Fletcher tried to give the old shrug, but gave an irrepressible groan instead, then endeavoured to cover it by saying in a careless tone, "I thought I might get a little excitement out of it, so I went soldiering like all the rest of you. I'm not good for much, but I can lead the way for the brave fellows who do the work. Officers make good targets, and a rebel bullet would cause no sorrow in taking me out of the world.

"Don't say that! *I* should grieve sincerely,

and yet I'm very glad you came, for it will always be a satisfaction to you in spite of your great loss."

"There are greater losses than right arms," muttered Mr. Fletcher gloomily, then checked himself, and added with a pleasant change in voice and face as he glanced at the wedding ring she wore,—

"This is not exactly the place for congratulations, but I can't help offering mine; for, if I'm not mistaken, *your* left hand also has grown doubly precious since we met?"

Christie had been wondering if he knew, and was much relieved to find he took it so well. Her face said more than her words, as she answered briefly,—

"Thank you. Yes, we were married the day David left, and have both been in the ranks ever since."

"Not wounded yet? your husband I mean," he said, getting over the hard words bravely.

"Three times, but not badly. I think a special angel stands before him with a shield," and Christie smiled as she spoke.

"I think a special angel stands behind him

with prayers that avail much," added Mr. Fletcher, looking up at her with an expression of reverence that touched her heart.

"Now I must go to my work, and you to sleep: you need all the rest you can get before you have to knock about in the ambulances again," she said, marking the feverish colour in his face, and knowing well that excitement was his only strength.

"How can I sleep in such an Inferno as this?"

"Try, you are so weak, you'll soon drop off;" and laying the cool tips of her fingers on his eyelids, she kept them shut till he yielded, with a long sigh of mingled weariness and pleasure, and was asleep before he knew it.

When he woke it was late at night, but little of night's blessed rest was known on board that boat, with its freight of suffering. Cries still came up from below, and moans of pain still sounded from the deck, where shadowy figures with lanterns went to and fro among the beds that in the darkness looked like graves.

Weak with pain and fever, the poor man

looked about him half bewildered, and conscious only of one desire, feebly called "Christie."

"Here I am," and the dull light of a lantern showed him her face, very worn and tired, but full of friendliest compassion.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, as he clutched her gown and peered up at her with mingled doubt and satisfaction in his haggard eyes.

"Just speak to me, let me touch you; I thought it was a dream—thank God it isn't. How much longer will this last?" he added, falling back on the softest pillows she could find for him.

"We shall soon land now; I believe there is an officers' hospital in the town, and you will be quite comfortable there."

"I want to go to your hospital, where is it?"

"I have none, and unless the old hotel is ready, I shall stay on the wharf with the boys until it is."

"Then I shall stay also. Don't send me away, Christie, I shall not be a trouble long

—surely David will let you help me die!" and poor Fletcher stretched his one hand imploringly to her in the first terror of the delirium that was coming on.

"I will not leave you. I'll take care of you, and no one can forbid it. Drink this, Philip, and trust to Christie."

He obeyed like a child, and soon fell again into a troubled sleep, while she sat by him, thinking about David.

The old hotel was ready, but by the time he got there Mr. Fletcher was past caring where he went, and for a week was too ill to know anything, except that Christie nursed him; then he turned the corner, and began to recover. She wanted him to go into more comfortable quarters, but he would not stir as long as she remained, so she put him in a little room by himself, got a man to wait on him, and gave him as much of her care and time as she could spare from her many duties. He was not an agreeable patient, I regret to say; he tried to bear his woes heroically, but did not succeed very well, not being used to any exertion of that sort, and though in

Christie's presence he did his best, his man confided to her that the Colonel was "as fractious as a teething baby, and the domineeringest party he ever nussed."

Some of Mr. Fletcher's attempts were comical, and some pathetic, for though the sacred circle of her wedding ring was an effectual barrier against a look or word of love, Christie knew that the old affection was not dead, for it showed itself in his desire to win her respect by all sorts of small sacrifices and efforts at self-control. He would not use many of the comforts sent him, but insisted on wearing an army dressing-gown, and slippers, that cost him a secret pang every time his eye was affronted by their ugliness; always, after an angry scene with his servant, he would be found going round among the men, bestowing little luxuries and kind words, not condescendingly but humbly, as if it was an atonement for his own shortcomings, and a tribute due to the brave fellows who bore their pains with a fortitude he did not imitate.

"Poor Philip! he tries so hard, I must pity,

not despise him, for he was never taught the manly virtues that make David what he is," thought Christie, as she went to him one day with an unusually happy face.

She found him sitting with a newly-opened package before him, and a gloomy look upon his face.

"See what rubbish one of my men has sent me, thinking I might value it," he said, pointing to a broken sword hilt, and offering her a badly-written letter.

She read it, and was touched by its affectionate respect and manly sympathy, for the good fellow had been one of those who saved the Colonel when he fell, and had kept the broken sword as a trophy of his bravery, "thinking it might be precious in the eyes of them that loved him."

"Poor Burny might have spared himself the trouble, for I've no one to give it to, and in my eyes it's nothing but a bit of old metal," said Fletcher, pushing the parcel away with a half irritable, half melancholy look.

"Give it to me as a parting keepsake. I have a fine collection of relics of the brave

men I have known, and this shall have a high place in my museum when I go home," said Christie, taking up the "bit of old metal" with more interest than she had ever felt in the brightest blade.

"Parting keepsake! are you going away?" asked Fletcher, catching at the words in anxious haste, yet looking pleased at her desire to keep the relic.

"Yes; I'm ordered to report in Washington, and start to-morrow."

"Then I'll go as escort. The doctor has been wanting me to leave for a week, and now I've no desire to stay," he said eagerly.

But Christie shook her head, and began to fold up paper and string with nervous industry, as she answered briefly,—

"I am not going directly to Washington, I have a week's furlough first."

"And what is to become of me?" asked Mr. Fletcher, as fretfully as a sick child, for he knew where her short holiday would be passed, and his temper got the upper hand for a minute.

"You should go home and be comfortably

nursed. You'll need care for some time, and your friends will be glad of a chance to help you, I've no doubt."

"I have no home, as you well know, and I don't believe I've got a friend in the world who cares whether I live or die."

"This looks as if you were mistaken," and Christie glanced about the little room, which was full of comforts and luxuries accumulated during his stay.

His face changed instantly, and he answered with the honest look and tone never given to any one but her,—

"I beg your pardon; I'm an ungrateful brute. But you see I'd just made up my mind to do something worth the doing, and now it is made impossible in a way that renders it hard to bear. You are very patient with me, and I owe my life to your care; I never can thank you for it, but I will take myself out of your way as soon as I can, and leave you free to enjoy your happy holiday. Heaven knows you have nobly earned it."

He said those last words so heartily that

all the bitterness went out of his voice, and Christie found it easy to reply, with a cordial smile,—

"I shall stay and see you comfortably off before I go myself. As for thanks and reward, I have both, for you *have* done something worth the doing, and you give me this."

She took up the broken blade as she spoke, and carried it away, looking proud of her new trophy.

Fletcher left next day, saying, while he pressed her hand as warmly as if the vigour of two had gone into his one,—

"You will let me come and see you by and by, when you too get your discharge, won't you?"

"So gladly that you shall never again say you have no home. But you must take care of yourself, or you will get the long discharge, and we can't spare you yet," she answered warmly.

"No danger of that: the worthless ones are too often left to cumber the earth; it is the precious ones who are taken," he said,

thinking of her as he looked into her tired face, and remembered all she had done for him.

Christie shivered involuntarily at those ominous words, but only said, "Good-bye, Philip," as he went feebly away, leaning on his servant's arm, while all the men touched their caps and wished the colonel a good journey.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SUNRISE.

THREE months later the war seemed drawing towards an end, and Christie was dreaming happy dreams of home and rest with David, when, as she sat one day writing a letter full of good news to the wife of a patient, a telegram was handed to her, and, tearing it open, she read,—

"Captain Sterling dangerously wounded. Tell his wife to come at once. E. WILKINS."

"No bad news I hope, ma'am?" said the young fellow anxiously, as his half-written letter fluttered to the ground, and Christie sat looking at that fateful strip of paper with all the strength and colour stricken out of her face by the fear that fell upon her.

"It might be worse. They told me he was

dying once, and when I got to him he met me at the door. I'll hope for the best now as I did then; but I never felt like this before," and she hid her face, as if daunted by ominous forebodings too strong to be controlled.

In a moment she was up and doing as calm and steady as if her heart was not torn by an anxiety too keen for words. By the time the news had flown through the house, she was ready; and, coming down with no luggage but a basket of comforts on her arm, she found the hall full of wan and crippled creatures gathered there to see her off, for no nurse in the hospital was more beloved than Mrs. Sterling. Many eyes followed her; many lips blessed her; many hands were outstretched for a sympathetic grasp: and, as the ambulance went clattering away, many hearts echoed the words of one grateful ghost of a man, "The Lord go with her, and stand by her as she's stood by us."

It was not a long journey that lay before her, but to Christie it seemed interminable, for all the way one unanswerable question

haunted her,“ Surely God will not be so cruel as to take David now when he has done his part so well and the reward is so near!”

It was dark when she arrived at the appointed spot; but Elisha Wilkins was there to receive her, and to her first breathless question, “ How is David?” answered briskly,—

“ Asleep, and doin' well, ma'am—at least I should say so, and I peaked at him the last thing before I started.”

“ Where is he?”

“ In the little hospital over yonder. Camp warn't no place for him, and I fetched him here as the nighest, and the best thing I could do for him.”

“ How is he wounded?”

“ Shot in the shoulder, side, and arm.”

“ Dangerously, you said?”

“ No, ma'am, that warn't and ain't my opinion. The sergeant sent that telegram, and I think he done wrong. The Captain is hit pretty bad; but it ain't by no means desperate accordin' to my way of thinkin',” replied the hopeful Wilkins, who seemed

mercifully gifted with an unusual flow of language.

"Thank heaven! Now go on and tell me all about it as fast as you can," commanded Christie, walking along the rough road so rapidly that Private Wilkins would have been distressed both in wind and limb if discipline and hardship had not done much for him.

"Well, you see, we've been skirmishin' round here for a week, for the woods are full of rebs waitin' to surprise some commissary stores that's expected along. Contrabands is always comin' into camp, and we do the best we can for the poor devils, and send 'em along where they'll be safe. Yesterday four women and a boy came: about as desperate a lot as I ever see; for they'd been two days and a night in the big swamp, wadin' up to their waists in mud and water, with nothin' to eat, and babies on their backs all the way. Every woman had a child, one dead, but she'd fetched it, 'so it might be buried free,' the poor soul said."

Mr. Wilkins stopped an instant as if for

breath, but the thought of his own "little chaps" filled his heart with pity for that bereaved mother; and he understood now why decent men were willing to be shot and starved for "the confounded niggers," as he once called them. "Go on," said Christie, and he made haste to tell the little story that was so full of intense interest to his listener.

"I never saw the Captain so worked up as he was by the sight of them wretched women. He fed and warmed 'em, comforted their poor scared souls, give what clothes we could find, buried the dead baby with his own hands, and nussed the other little creeters as if they were his own. It warn't safe to keep 'em more'n a day, so when night come the Captain got 'em off down the river as quiet as he could. Me and another man helped him, for he wouldn't trust no one but himself to boss the job. A boat was ready—blest if I know how he got it,—and about midnight we led them women down to it. The boy was a strong lad, and any of 'em could help row, for the current would take 'em along rapid.

This way, ma'am; be we going too fast for you?"

"Not fast enough. Finish quick."

"We got down the bank all right, the Captain standing in the little path that led to the river to keep guard, while Bates held the boat stiddy and I put the women in. Things was goin' lovely when the poor gal who'd lost her baby must needs jump out and run up to thank the Captain agin for all he'd done for her. Some of them sly rascals was watchin' the river: they see her, heard Bates call out, 'Come back, wench; come back,' and they fired. She did come back like a shot, and we give that boat a push that sent it into the middle of the stream. Then we run along below the bank, and come out farther down to draw off the rebs. Some followed us, and we give it to 'em handsome. But some warn't deceived, and we heard 'em firin' away at the Captain; so we got back to him as fast as we could, but it warn't soon enough.—Take my arm, Mis Sterlin': it's kinder rough here."

"And you found him"—

"Lyin' right acrost the path, with two dead men in front of him; for he'd kep' 'em off like a lion till the firin' brought up a lot of our fellers, and the rebs skedaddled. I thought he was dead—for by the star-light I see he was bleedin' awful—hold on, my dear, hold on to me—he warn't, thank God, and looked up at me and sez, sez he, 'Are they safe?' 'They be, Captain,' sez I. 'Then it's all right,' sez he, smilin' in that bright way of his, and then dropped off as quiet as a lamb. We got him back to camp double quick, and when the surgeon see them three wounds he shook his head, and I mistrusted that it warn't no joke, so when the Captain come to I asked him what I could do or git for him, and he answered in a whisper, 'My wife.'"

For an instant Christie did "hold on" to Mr. Wilkins's arm, for those two words seemed to take all her strength away. Then the thought that David was waiting for her strung her nerves and gave her courage to bear anything.

"Is he here?" she asked of her guide a

moment later, as he stopped before a large, half-ruined house, through whose windows dim lights and figures were seen moving to and fro.

"Yes, ma'am; we've made a hospital of this; the Captain's got the best room in it, and now he's got the best nuss that's goin' anywheres. Won't you have a drop of something jest as a stand-by, before you see him?"

"Nothing; take me to him at once."

"Here we are, then. Still sleepin': that looks well."

Mr. Wilkins softly led the way down a long hall, opened a door, and, after one look, fell back and saluted as the Captain's wife passed in.

A surgeon was bending over the low bed, and when a hoarse voice at his elbow asked,—

"How is he?"

The doctor answered without looking up,—

"Done for: this shot through the lungs will finish him before morning, I'm afraid.

"Then leave him to me: I am his wife,"

said the voice, clear and sharp now with the anguish those hard words had brought.

"Good God! why did no one tell me? My dear lady, I thought you were a nurse," cried the poor surgeon, rent with remorse for what now seemed the brutal frankness of his answer, as he saw the white face of the woman at his side, with a look in her eyes harder to see than the bitterest tears that ever fell.

"I *am* a nurse. If you can do nothing, please go and leave him to me the little while he has to live."

Without a word the surgeon vanished, and Christie was alone with David.

The instant she saw him she felt that there was no hope, for she had seen too many faces wear the look his wore to be deceived even by her love. Lying with closed eyes already sunken by keen suffering, hair damp with the cold dew on his forehead, a scarlet spot on either cheek, grey lines about the mouth, and pale lips parted by the painful breaths that came in heavy gasps or fluttered fitfully,—this was what Christie saw, and after that

long look she knew the truth, and sank down beside the bed, crying, with an exceeding bitter cry,—

"O David, O my husband! must I give you up so soon?"

His eyes opened then, and he turned his cheek to hers, whispering, with a look that tried to be a smile, but ended in a sigh of satisfaction,—

"I knew you'd come;" then, as a tearless sob shook her from head to foot, he added steadily, though each breath cost a pang, "Yes, dear, I must go first, but it won't be hard with you to help me do it bravely."

In that supremely bitter moment there returned to Christie's memory certain words of the marriage service that had seemed so beautiful when she took part in it, "For better for worse, till death us do part." She had known the better, so short, so sweet! this was the worse, and till death came she must keep faithfully the promise made with such a happy heart. The thought brought with it unexpected strength, and gave her courage to crush down her grief, seal up her

tears, and show a brave and tender face as she took that feeble hand in hers, ready to help her husband die.

He saw and thanked her for the effort, felt the sustaining power of a true wife's heart, and seemed to have no other care, since she was by him steadfast to the end. He lay looking at her with such serene and happy eyes that she would not let a tear, a murmur mar his peace; and for a little while she felt as if she had gone out of this turbulent world into a heavenly one, where love reigned supreme.

But such hours are as brief as beautiful, and at midnight mortal suffering proved that immortal joy had not yet begun.

Christie had sat by many death-beds, but never one like this; for, through all the bitter pangs that tried his flesh, David's soul remained patient and strong, upheld by the faith that conquers pain and makes even Death a friend. In the quiet time that went before, he had told his last wishes, given his last messages of love, and now had but one desire—to go soon, that Christie might be

spared the trial of seeing suffering she could neither lighten nor share.

"Go and rest, dear; go and rest," he whispered more than once. "Let Wilkins come; this is too much for you. I thought it would be easier; but I am so strong, life fights for me inch by inch."

But Christie would not go, and for her sake David made haste to die.

Hour after hour the tide ebbed fast, hour after hour the man's patient soul sat waiting for release, and hour after hour the woman's passionate heart clung to the love that seemed drifting away, leaving her alone upon the shore. Once or twice she could not bear it, and cried out in her despair,—

"No, it is not just that you should suffer this for a creature whose whole life is not worth a day of your brave, useful, precious one! Why did you pay such a price for that girl's liberty?" she said, as the thought of her own wrecked future fell upon her dark and heavy.

"Because I owed it—she suffered more than this seeing her baby die;—I thought of

you in her place, and I could not help doing it."

The broken answer, the reproachful look, wrung Christie's heart and, she was silent; for, in all the knightly tales she loved so well, what Sir Galahad had rescued a more wretched, wronged, and helpless woman than the poor soul whose dead baby David buried tenderly before he bought the mother's freedom with his life?

Only one regret escaped him as the end drew very near, and mortal weakness brought relief from mortal pain. The first red streaks of dawn shone in the east, and his dim eyes brightened at the sight.

"Such a beautiful world!" he whispered, with the ghost of a smile, "and so much good work to do in it; I wish I could stay and help a little longer!" he added, while the shadow deepened on his face. But soon he said, trying to press Christie's hand, still holding his,—"You will do my part, and do it better than I could. Don't mourn, dear heart, but work; and by and by you will be comforted."

"I will try; but I think I shall soon follow you, and need no comfort here," answered Christie, already finding consolation in the thought. "What is it, David?" she asked a little later, as she saw his eyes turn wistfully towards the window where the rosy glow was slowly creeping up the sky.

"I want to see the sun rise—that used to be our happy time—turn my face towards the light, Christie, and we'll wait for it together."

An hour later, when the first pale ray crept in at the low window, two faces lay upon the pillow; one full of the despairing grief for which there seems no balm, the other with lips and eyes of solemn peace, and that mysterious expression, lovelier than any smile, which death leaves as a tender token that all is well with the new-born soul.

To Christie that was the darkest hour of the dawn, but for David sunrise had already come.

## CHAPTER X.

### LITTLE HEART'S-EASE.

WHEN it was all over, the long journey home, the quiet funeral, the first sad excitement, then came the bitter moment when life says to the bereaved, "Take up your burden and go on alone." Christie's had been the still, tearless grief, hardest to bear, most impossible to comfort; and while Mrs. Sterling bore her loss with the sweet patience of a pious heart, and Letty mourned her brother with the tender sorrow that finds relief in natural ways, the widow sat among them as tranquil, colourless, and mute as if her soul had followed David, leaving the shadow of her former self behind.

"He will not come to me, but I shall go to him," seemed to be the thought that sustained

her, and those who loved her said despairingly to one another, "Her heart is broken: she will not linger long."

But one woman, wise in her own motherliness, always answered hopefully, "Don't you be troubled; nater knows what's good for us, and works in her own way. Hearts like this don't break, and sorrer only makes 'em stronger. You mark my words: the blessed baby that's a-comin' in the summer will work a merrycle, and you'll see this poor dear a happy woman yet."

Few believed in the prophecy; but Mrs. Wilkins stoutly repeated it, and watched over Christie like a mother, often trudging up the lane, in spite of wind or weather, to bring some dainty mess; some remarkable puzzle in red or yellow calico to be used as a pattern for the little garments the three women sewed with such tender interest, consecrated with such tender tears; or news of the war fresh from Lisha, who "was goin' to see it through ef he come home without a leg to stand on." A cheery, hopeful, wholesome influence she brought with her, and all the house seemed

to brighten as she sat there, freeing her mind upon every subject that came up, from the delicate little shirts Mrs. Sterling knit in spite of failing eyesight, to the fall of Richmond, which, the prophetic spirit being strong within her, Mrs. Wilkins foretold with sibylline precision.

She alone could win a faint smile from Christie with some odd saying, some shrewd opinion, and she alone brought tears to the melancholy eyes that sorely needed such healing dew; for she carried little Adelaide, and without a word put her into Christie's arms, there to cling and smile and babble till she had soothed the bitter pain and hunger of a suffering heart.

She and Mr. Power held Christie up through that hard time, ministering to soul and body with their hope and faith till life grew possible again, and from the dust of a great affliction rose the sustaining power she had sought so long.

As spring came on, and victory after victory proclaimed that the war was drawing to an end, Christie's sad resignation was broken by

gusts of grief so stormy, so inconsolable, that those about her trembled for her life. It was so hard to see the regiments come home proudly bearing the torn battle-flags, weary, wounded, but victorious, to be rapturously welcomed, thanked, and honoured by the grateful country they had served so well; to see all this, and think of David in his grave unknown, unrewarded, and forgotten by all but a faithful few.

"I used to dream of a time like this, to hope and plan for it, and cheer myself with the assurance that, after all our hard work, our long separation, and the dangers we had faced, David would get some honour, receive some reward, at least be kept for me to love and serve and live with for a little while. But these men, who have merely saved a banner, led a charge, or lost an arm, get all the glory, while he gave his life so nobly; yet few know it, no one thanked him, and I am left desolate when so many useless ones might have been taken in his place. Oh, it is not just! I cannot forgive God for robbing him of all his honours, and me of all my happiness."

So lamented Christie, with the rebellious protest of a strong nature learning submission through the stern discipline of grief. In vain Mr. Power told her that David had received a better reward than any human hand could give him, in the gratitude of many women, the respect of many men; that to do bravely the daily duties of an upright life was more heroic, in God's sight, than to achieve in an enthusiastic moment a single deed that won the world's applause; and that the seeming incompleteness of his life was beautifully rounded by the act that caused his death, although no eulogy recorded it, no song embalmed it, and few knew it but those he saved, those he loved, and the Great Commander who promoted him to the higher rank he had won.

Christie could not be content with this invisible, intangible recompense for her hero: she wanted to see, to know beyond a doubt, that justice had been done; and beat herself against the barrier that baffles bereaved humanity till impatient despair was wearied out, and passionate heart gave up the struggle.

Then, when no help seemed possible, she found it where she least expected it, in herself. Searching for religion, she had found love: now seeking to follow love, she found religion. The desire for it had never left her, and, while serving others, she was earning this reward; for when her life seemed to lie in ashes, from their midst this slender spire of flame, purifying while it burned, rose trembling towards heaven, showing her great sacrifices turn to greater compensations, giving her a light and warmth and consolation, and teaching her the lesson all must learn.

God was very patient with her, sending much help, and letting her climb up to Him by all the tender ways aspiring souls can lead unhappy hearts.

David's room had been her refuge when those dark hours came, and, sitting there one day, trying to understand the great mystery that parted her from David, she seemed to receive an answer to her many prayers for some sign that death had not estranged them. The house was very still, the window open,

and a soft south wind was wandering through the room with hints of May-flowers on its wings. Suddenly a breath of music startled her, so airy, sweet, and short-lived that no human voice or hand could have produced it. Again and again it came, a fitful and melodious sigh, that to one made superstitious by much sorrow, seemed like a spirit's voice delivering some message from another world.

Christie looked and listened with hushed breath and expectant heart, believing that some special answer was to be given her. But in a moment she saw it was no supernatural sound, only the south wind whispering in David's flute that hung beside the window. Disappointment came first, then warm over her sore heart flowed the tender recollection that she used to call the old flute "David's voice," for into it he poured the joy and sorrow, unrest and pain, he told no living soul. How often it had been her lullaby, before she learned to read its language; how gaily it had piped for others; how plaintively it had sung for him alone and

in the night; and now how full of pathetic music was that hymn of consolation fitfully whispered by the wind's soft breath.

Ah, yes: this was a better answer than any supernatural voice could have given her; a more helpful sign than any phantom face or hand; a surer confirmation of her hope than subtle argument or sacred promise: for it brought back the memory of the living, loving man so vividly, so tenderly, that Christie felt as if the barrier was down, and welcomed a new sense of David's nearness with the softest tears that had flowed since she closed the serene eyes whose last look had been for her.

After that hour she spent the long spring days lying on the old couch in his room, reading his books, thinking of his love and life, and listening to David's voice. She always heard it now, whether the wind touched the flute with airy fingers or it hung mute; and it sung to her songs of patience, hope, and cheer, till a mysterious peace came to her, and she discovered in herself the strength she had asked, yet never thought to find. Under the snow, herbs of grace had

been growing silently; and, when the heavy rains had melted all the frost away, they sprung up to blossom beautifully in the sun that shines for every spire of grass, and makes it perfect in its time and place.

Mrs. Wilkins was right; for one June morning, when she laid "that blessed baby" in its mother's arms, Christie's first words were,—

"Don't let me die: I must live for baby now," and gathered David's little daughter to her breast, as if the soft touch of the fumbling hands had healed every wound and brightened all the world.

"I told you so; God bless 'em both!" and Mrs. Wilkins retired precipitately to the hall, where she sat down upon the stairs and cried most comfortable tears; for her maternal heart was full of a thanksgiving too deep for words.

A sweet, secluded time to Christie, as she brooded over her little treasure and forgot there was a world outside. A fond and jealous mother, but a very happy one, for after the bitterest came the tenderest ex-

perience of her life. She felt its sacredness, its beauty, and its high responsibilities; accepted them prayerfully, and found unspeakable delight in fitting herself to bear them worthily, always remembering that she had a double duty to perform toward the fatherless little creature given to her care.

It is hardly necessary to mention the changes one small individual made in that feminine household. The purring and clucking that went on; the panics over a pin-prick; the consultations over a pellet of chamomile; the raptures at the dawn of a first smile; the solemn prophecies of future beauty, wit, and wisdom in the bud of a woman; the general adoration of the entire family at the wicker shrine wherein lay the idol, a mass of flannel and cambric with a bald head at one end, and a pair of microscopic blue socks at the other. Mysterious little porringers sat unreproved upon the parlour fire, small garments aired at every window, lights burned at unholy hours, and three agitated nightcaps congregated at the

faintest chirp of the restless bird in the maternal nest.

Of course grandma grew young again, and produced nursery reminiscences on every occasion; Aunt Letty trotted day and night to gratify the imaginary wants of the idol, and Christie was so entirely absorbed that the whole South might have been swallowed up by an earthquake without causing her as much consternation as the appearance of a slight rash upon the baby.

No flower in David's garden throve like his little June rose; no wind was allowed to visit her too roughly; and when rain fell without, she took her daily airing in the green-house, where from her mother's arms she soon regarded the gay sight with such sprightly satisfaction that she seemed a little flower herself dancing on its stem.

She was named Ruth for grandma, but Christie always called her "Little Heart's-ease, or Pansy," and those who smiled at first at the mother's fancy, came in time to see that there was an unusual fitness in the name. All the bitterness seemed taken out

of Christie's sorrow by the soft magic of the child: there was so much to live for now she spoke no more of dying; and, holding that little hand in hers, it grew easier to go on along the way that led to David.

A prouder mother never lived; and, as baby waxed in beauty and in strength, Christie longed for all the world to see her. A sweet, peculiar little face she had, sunny and fair; but, under the broad forehead where the bright hair fell as David's used to do, there shone a pair of dark and solemn eyes, so large, so deep, and often so unchildlike, that her mother wondered where she got them. Even when she smiled the shadow lingered in these eyes, and when she wept they filled and overflowed with great, quiet tears like flowers too full of dew. Christie often said remorsefully,—

"My little Pansy! I put my own sorrow into your baby soul, and now it looks back at me with this strange wistfulness, and these great drops are the unsubmissive tears I locked up in my heart because I would not

be grateful for the good gift God gave me, even while He took that other one away. O baby, forgive your mother; and don't let her find that she has given you clouds instead of sunshine."

This fear helped Christie to keep her own face cheerful, her own heart tranquil, her own life as sunny, healthful, and hopeful as she wished her child's to be. For this reason she took garden and greenhouse into her own hands when Bennet gave them up, and, with a stout lad to help her, did well this part of the work that David bequeathed to her. It was a pretty sight to see the mother with her year-old daughter out among the fresh, green things: the little golden head bobbing here and there like a stray sunbeam; the baby voice telling sweet, unintelligible stories to bird and bee and butterfly; or the small creature fast asleep in a basket under a rose-bush, swinging in a hammock from a tree, or in Bran's keeping, rosy, vigorous, and sweet with sun and air, and the wholesome influence of a wise and tender love.

While Christie worked she planned her daughter's future, as mothers will, and had but one care concerning it. She did not fear poverty, but the thought of being straitened for the means of educating little Ruth afflicted her. She meant to teach her to labour heartily and see no degradation in it, but she could not bear to feel that her child should be denied the harmless pleasures that make youth sweet, the opportunities that educate, the society that ripens character and gives a rank which money cannot buy. A little sum to put away for baby, safe from all risk, ready to draw from as each need came, and sacredly devoted to this end, was now Christie's sole ambition.

With this purpose at her heart she watched her fruit and nursed her flowers; found no task too hard, no sun too hot, no weed too unconquerable; and soon the garden David planted, when his life seemed barren, yielded lovely harvests to swell his little daughter's portion.

One day Christie received a letter from Uncle Enos, expressing a wish to see her if

she cared to come so far and "stop a spell." It both surprised and pleased her, and she resolved to go, glad that the old man remembered her, and proud to show him the great success of her life, as she considered baby.

So she went, was hospitably received by the ancient cousin five times removed who kept house, and greeted with as much cordiality as Uncle Enos ever showed to any one. He looked askance at the baby, as if he had not bargained for the honour of her presence; but he said nothing, and Christie wisely refrained from mentioning that Ruth was the most remarkable child ever born.

She soon felt at home, and went about the old house, visiting familiar nooks with the bitter, sweet satisfaction of such returns. It was sad to miss Aunt Betsey in the big kitchen, strange to see Uncle Enos sit all day in his arm-chair, too helpless now to plod about the farm and carry terror to the souls of those who served him. He was still a crabbed, gruff old man; but the narrow, hard

old heart was a little softer than it used to be; and he sometimes betrayed the longing for his kindred that the aged often feel when infirmity makes them desire tenderer props than any they can hire.

Christie saw this wish, and tried to gratify it with a dutiful affection which could not fail to win its way. Baby unconsciously lent a hand, for Uncle Enos could not long withstand the sweet enticements of this little kinswoman. He did not own the conquest in words, but was seen to cuddle his small captivator in private, allowed all sorts of liberties with his spectacles, his pockets, and bald pate, and never seemed more comfortable than when she confiscated his newspaper, and, sitting on his knee, read it to him in a pretty language of her own.

"She's a good little gal; looks consid'able like you; but you warn't never such a quiet puss as she is," he said one day, as the child was toddling about the room with an old doll of her mother's lately disinterred from its tomb in the garret.

"She is like her father in that. But I get

quieter as I grow old, uncle," answered Christie, who sat sewing near him.

"You be growing old, that's a fact; but somehow its kind of becomin'. I never thought you'd be so much of a lady, and look so well after all you've ben through," added Uncle Enos, vainly trying to discover what made Christie's manners so agreeable in spite of her plain dress, and her face so pleasant in spite of the gray hair at her temples and the lines about her mouth.

It grew still pleasanter to see as she smiled and looked up at him with the soft yet bright expression that always made him think of her mother.

"I'm glad you don't consider me an entire failure, uncle. You know you predicted it. But though I have gone through a good deal, I don't regret my attempt, and when I look at Pansy I feel as if I'd made a grand success."

"You haven't made much money, I guess. If you don't mind tellin', what *have* you got to live on?" asked the old man, unwilling to acknowledge any life a success, if dollars and cents were left out of it.

"Only David's pension, and what I can make by my garden."

"The old lady has to have some on't, don't she?"

"She has a little money of her own; but I see that she and Letty have two-thirds of all I make."

"That ain't a fair bargain if you do all the work."

"Ah, but we don't make bargains, sir; we work for one another, and share everything together."

"So like women!" grumbled Uncle Enos, longing to see that "the property was fixed up square."

"How are you goin' to eddicate the little gal? I s'pose you think as much of culter and so on as ever you did," he presently added with a gruff laugh.

"More," answered Christie, smiling too, as she remembered the old quarrels. "I shall earn the money, sir. If the garden fails I can teach, nurse, sew, write, cook even; for I've half a dozen useful accomplishments at my fingers' ends, thanks to the

education you and dear Aunt Betsey gave me, and I may have to use them all for baby's sake."

Pleased by the compliment, yet a little conscience-stricken at the small share he deserved of it, Uncle Enos sat rubbing up his glasses a minute, before he led to the subject he had in his mind.

"Ef you fall sick or die, what then?"

"I've thought of that," and Christie caught up the child as if her love could keep even death at bay. But Pansy soon struggled down again, for the dirty-faced doll was taking a walk and could not be detained. "If I am taken from her, then my little girl must do as her mother did. God has orphans in His special care, and He won't forget mine, I am sure."

Uncle Enos had a coughing spell just then, and when he got over it, he said with an effort, for even to talk of giving away his substance cost him a pang,—

"I'm gettin' into years now, and it's about time I fixed up matters in case I'm took suddin'. I always meant to give you a little

something, but as you didn't ask for't, I took good care of it, and it ain't none the worse for waitin' a spell. I jest speak on't, so you needn't be anxious about the little gal. It ain't much, but it will make things easy, I reckon."

"You are very kind, uncle; and I am more grateful than I can tell. I don't want a penny for myself, but I should love to know that my daughter was to have an easier life than mine."

"I s'pose you thought of that when you come so quick?" said the old man, with a suspicious look, that made Christie's eyes kindle as they used to years ago, but she answered honestly,—

"I did think of it and hope it, yet I should have come quicker if you had been in the poor-house."

Neither spoke for a minute; for, in spite of generosity and gratitude, the two natures struck fire when they met as inevitably as flint and steel.

"What's your opinion of missionaries?" asked Uncle Enos, after a spell of meditation.

"If I had any money to leave them, I should bequeath it to those who help the heathen here at home, and should let the innocent Feejee Islanders worship their idols a little longer in benighted peace," answered Christie, in her usual decided way.

"That's my idee exactly; but it's uncommon hard to settle *which* of them that stays at home you'll trust your money to. You see Betsey was always pesterin' me to give to charity things; but I told her it was better to save up and give it in a handsome lump that looked well, and was a credit to you. When she was dyin' she reminded me on't, and I promised I'd do something before I follered. I've been turning on't over in my mind for a number of months, and I don't seem to find anything that's jest right. You've ben round among the charity folks lately accordin' to your tell, now what would you do if you had a tidy little sum to dispose on?"

"Help the freed people."

The answer came so quick that it nearly took the old gentleman's breath away, and

he looked at his niece with his mouth open after an involuntary "Do tell!" had escaped him.

"David helped give them their liberty, and I would so gladly help them to enjoy it!" cried Christie, all the old enthusiasm blazing up, but with a clearer, steadier flame than in the days when she dreamed splendid dreams by the kitchen fire.

"Well, no; that wouldn't meet my views. What else is there?" asked the old man, quite unmanned by her benevolent ardour.

"Wounded soldiers, destitute children, ill-paid women, young people struggling for independence, homes, hospitals, schools, churches, and God's charity all over the world."

"That's the pesky part of it: there's such a lot to choose from; I don't know much about any of 'em," began Uncle Enos, looking like a perplexed raven with a treasure which it cannot decide where to hide.

"Whose fault is that, sir?"

The question hit the old man full in the conscience, and he winced, remembering how

many of Betsey's charitable impulses he had nipped in the bud, and now all the accumulated alms she would have been so glad to scatter weighed upon him heavily. He rubbed his bald head with a yellow bandana, and moved uneasily in his chair, as if he wanted to get up and finish the neglected job that made his helplessness so burdensome.

"I'll ponder on't a spell, and make up my mind," was all he said, and never renewed the subject again.

But he had very little time to ponder, and he never did make up his mind; for a few months after Christie's long visit ended, Uncle Enos "was took suddin'," and left all he had to her.

Not an immense fortune, but far larger than she expected, and great was her anxiety to use wisely this unlooked-for benefaction. She was very grateful; but she kept nothing for herself, feeling that David's pension was enough, and preferring the small sum he earned so dearly to the thousands the old man had hoarded up for years. A good portion was put by for Ruth, something for

" mother and Letty" that want might never touch them, and the rest she kept for David's work, believing that, so spent, the money would be blest.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AT FORTY.

"NEARLY twenty years since I set out to seek my fortune. It has been a long search, but I think I have found it at last. I only asked to be a useful, happy woman, and my wish is granted; for I believe I *am* useful; I *know* I am happy."

Christie looked so as she sat alone in the flowery parlour one September afternoon, thinking over her life with a grateful, cheerful spirit. Forty to-day, and pausing at that half-way house between youth and age, she looked back into the past without bitter regret or unsubmissive grief, and forward into the future with courageous patience; for three good angels attended her, and with faith, hope, and charity to brighten life, no woman

need lament lost youth or fear approaching age. Christie did not, and though her eyes filled with quiet tears as they were raised to the faded cap and sheathed sword hanging on the wall, none fell; and in a moment tender sorrow changed to still tenderer joy as her glance wandered to rosy little Ruth playing hospital with her dollies in the porch. They shone with genuine satisfaction as they went from the letters and papers on her table to the garden, where several young women were at work, with a healthful colour in the cheeks that had been very pale and thin in the spring.

"I think David is satisfied with me; for I have given all my heart and strength to his work, and it prospers well," she said to herself, and then her face grew thoughtful as she recalled a late event which seemed to have opened a new field of labour for her if she chose to enter it.

A few evenings before she had gone to one of the many meetings of working-women, which had made some stir of late. Not a first visit, for she was much interested in the

subject, and full of sympathy for this class of workers.

There were speeches, of course, and of the most unparliamentary sort, for the meeting was composed almost entirely of women, each eager to tell her special grievance or theory. Any one who chose got up and spoke; and, whether wisely or foolishly, each proved how great was the ferment now going on, and how difficult it was for the two classes to meet and help one another in spite of the utmost need on one side and the sincerest good-will on the other. The workers poured out their wrongs and hardships passionately or plaintively, demanding or imploring justice, sympathy, and help; displaying the ignorance, incapacity, and prejudice, which make their need all the more pitiful, their relief all the more imperative.

The ladies did their part with kindliness, patience, and often unconscious condescension, showing in their turn how little they knew of the real trials of the women whom they longed to serve, how very narrow a sphere of usefulness they were fitted for in

spite of culture and intelligence, and how rich they were in generous theories, how poor in practical methods of relief.

One accomplished creature, with learning radiating from every pore, delivered a charming little essay on the strong-minded women of antiquity; then, taking labour into the region of art, painted delightful pictures of the time when all would work harmoniously together in an Ideal Republic, where each did the work she liked, and was paid for it in liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Unfortunately she talked over the heads of her audience, and it was like telling fairy tales to hungry children to describe Aspasia, discussing Greek politics with Pericles and Plato reposing upon ivory couches, or Hypatia modestly delivering philosophical lectures to young men behind a Tyrian purple curtain; and the Ideal Republic met with little favour from anxious seamstresses, type-setters, and shop-girls, who said ungratefully among themselves, "That's all very pretty, but I don't see how it's going to better wages among us *now*."

Another eloquent sister gave them a political oration which fired the revolutionary blood in their veins, and made them eager to rush to the State-house *en masse*, and demand the ballot before one half of them were quite clear what it meant, and the other half were as unfit for it as any ignorant Patrick bribed with a dollar and a sup of whiskey.

A third well-wisher quenched their ardour like a wet blanket, by reading reports of sundry labour reforms in foreign parts; most interesting, but made entirely futile by differences of climate, needs, and customs. She closed with a cheerful budget of statistics, giving the exact number of needlewomen who had starved, gone mad, or committed suicide during the past year; the enormous profits wrung by capitalists from the blood and muscles of their employés; and the alarming increase in the cost of living, which was about to plunge the nation into debt and famine, if not destruction generally.

When she sat down despair was visible on many countenances, and immediate starvation seemed to be waiting at the door to clutch

them as they went out; for the impressible creatures believed every word and saw no salvation anywhere.

Christie had listened intently to all this; had admired, regretted, or condemned as each spoke; and felt a steadily increasing sympathy for all, and a strong desire to bring the helpers and the helped into truer relations with each other.

The dear ladies were so earnest, so hopeful, and so unpractically benevolent, that it grieved her to see so much breath wasted, so much good-will astray, while the expectant, despondent, or excited faces of the workwomen touched her heart; for well she knew how much they needed help, how eager they were for light, how ready to be led, if some one would only show a possible way.

As the statistical extinguisher retired, beaming with satisfaction at having added her mite to the good cause, a sudden and uncontrollable impulse moved Christie to rise in her place and ask leave to speak. It was readily granted, and a little stir of interest greeted her, for she was known to many as

Mr. Power's friend, David Sterling's wife, or an army nurse who had done well. Whispers circulated quickly, and faces brightened as they turned towards her; for she had a helpful look, and her first words pleased them. When the president invited her to the platform she paused on the lowest step, saying, with an expressive look and gesture,—

"I am better here, thank you; for I have been and mean to be a working-woman all my life."

"Hear! hear!" cried a stout matron in a gay bonnet, and the rest indorsed the sentiment with a hearty round. Then they were very still, and then, in a clear, steady voice, with the sympathetic undertone to it that is so magical in its effect, Christie made her first speech in public since she left the stage.

That early training stood her in good stead now, giving her self-possession, power of voice, and ease of gesture; while the purpose at her heart lent her the sort of simple eloquence that touches, persuades, and convinces better than logic, flattery, or oratory.

What she said she hardly knew: words

came faster than she could utter them, thoughts pressed upon her, and all the lessons of her life rose vividly before her, to give weight to her arguments, value to her counsels, and the force of truth to every sentence she uttered. She had known so many of the same trials, troubles, and temptations that she could speak understandingly of them; and, better still, she had conquered or outlived so many of them, that she could not only pity but help others to do the same. Having found in labour her best teacher, comforter, and friend, she could tell those who listened that, no matter how hard or humble the task at the beginning, if faithfully and bravely performed, it would surely prove a stepping-stone to something better, and with each honest effort they were fitting themselves for the nobler work, labour, and larger liberty God meant them to enjoy.

The women felt that this speaker was one of them, for the same lines were on her face that they saw on their own, her hands were no fine lady's hands, her dress plainer than some of theirs, her speech simple enough for

all to understand, cheerful, comforting, and full of practical suggestion, illustrations out of their own experience, and a spirit of companionship that uplifted their despondent hearts.

Yet more impressive than anything she said was the subtle magnetism of character; for that has a universal language which all can understand. They saw and felt that a genuine woman stood down there among them like a sister, ready with head, heart, and hand to help them help themselves; not offering pity as an alms, but justice as a right. Hardship and sorrow, long effort and late-won reward, had been hers, they knew; wifehood, motherhood, and widowhood brought her very near to them, and behind her was the background of an earnest life, against which this figure with health on the cheeks, gray hair on the forehead, hope in the eyes, courage on the lips, and the ardour of a wide benevolence warming the whole countenance, stood out full of unconscious dignity and beauty; an example to comfort, touch, and inspire them.

It was not a long speech, and in it there

was no learning, no statistics, and no politics; yet it was the speech of the evening, and when it was over no one else seemed to have anything to say. As the meeting broke up, Christie's hand was shaken by many roughened by the needle, stained with printer's ink, or hard with humbler toil; many faces smiled gratefully at her, and many voices thanked her heartily. But sweeter than any applause were the words of one woman who grasped her hand and whispered with wet eyes,—

"I knew your blessed husband; he was very good to me, and I've been thanking the Lord he had such a wife for his reward!"

Christie was thinking of all this as she sat alone that day, and asking herself if she should go on; for the ladies had been as grateful as the women; had begged her to come and speak again, saying they needed just such a mediator to bridge across the space that now divided them from those they wished to serve. She certainly seemed fitted to act as interpreter between the two classes; for, from the gentleman her father she had

inherited the fine instincts, gracious manners, and unblemished name of an old and honourable race, from the farmer's daughter, her mother, came the equally valuable dower of practical virtues, a sturdy love of independence, and great respect for the skill and courage that can win it.

Such women were much needed, and are not always easy to find, for even in democratic America the hand that earns its daily bread must wear some talent, name, or honour as an ornament, before it is very cordially shaken by those that wear white gloves.

"Perhaps this is the task my life has been fitting me for," she said. "A great and noble one, which I should be proud to accept and help accomplish, if I can. Others have finished the emancipation work, and done it splendidly, even at the cost of all this blood and sorrow. I came too late to do anything but give my husband and behold the glorious end.

"This new task seems to offer me the chance of being among the pioneers, to do the hard work, share the persecution, and help lay

the foundation of a new emancipation whose happy success I may never see. Yet I had rather be remembered as those brave beginners are, though many of them missed the triumph, than as the late comers will be, who only beat the drums and wave the banners when the victory is won."

Just then the gate creaked on its hinges, a step sounded in the porch, and little Ruth ran in to say, in an audible whisper,—

"It's a lady, mamma, a very pretty lady: can you see her?"

"Yes, dear, ask her in."

There was a rustle of sweeping silks through the narrow hall, a vision of a very lovely woman in the doorway, and two daintily gloved hands were extended as an eager voice asked,—

"Dearest Christie, don't you remember Bella Carrol?"

Christie did remember, and had her in her arms directly, utterly regardless of the imminent destruction of a marvellous hat, or the bad effect of tears on violet ribbons. Presently they were sitting close together, talking with

April faces, and telling their stories as women must, when they meet after the lapse of years. A few letters had passed between them, but Bella had been abroad, and Christie too busy living her life to have much time to write about it.

"Your mother, Bella? how is she, and where?"

"Still with Augustine, and he, you know, is melancholy mad: very quiet, very patient, and very kind to every one but himself. His penances for the sins of his race would soon kill him if mother was not there to watch over him. And her penance is never to leave him."

"Dear child, don't tell me more; it is too sad. Talk of yourself and Harry. Now you smile, so I'm sure all is well with him."

"Yes, thank heaven! Christie, I do believe fate means to spare us, as dear old Dr. Shirley said. I never can be gay again, but I keep as cheerful and busy as I can for Harry's sake, and he does the same for mine. We shall always be together, and all in all to one another, for we can never marry and have

homes apart, you know. We have wandered over the face of the earth for several years, and now we mean to settle down and be as happy and as useful as we can."

"That's brave! I am so glad to hear it, and so truly thankful it is possible. But tell me, Bella, what Harry means to do? You spoke in one of your first letters of his being hard at work studying medicine. Is that to be his profession?"

"Yes; I don't know what made him choose it, unless it was the hope that he might spare other families from a curse like ours, or lighten it if it came. After Helen's death he was a changed creature; no longer a wild boy, but a man. I told him what you said to me, and it gave him hope. Dr. Shirley confirmed it as far as he dared; and Hal resolved to make the most of his one chance by interesting himself in some absorbing study, and leaving no room for fear, no time for dangerous recollections!"

"I was so glad, and mother so comforted, for we both feared that sad trouble would destroy him. He studied hard, got on

splendidly, and then went abroad to finish off. I went with him, for poor August was past hope, and mamma would not let me help her. The doctor said it was best for me to be away, and excellent for Hal to have me with him, to cheer him up, and keep him steady with a little responsibility. We have been happy together, in spite of our trouble, he in his profession, and I in him; now he is ready, so we have come home, and now the hardest part begins for me."

"How, Bella?"

"He has his work and loves it: I have nothing after my duty to him is done. I find I've lost my taste for the old pleasures and pursuits, and though I have tried more sober solid ones, there still remains much time to hang heavy on my hands, and such an empty place in my heart, that even Harry's love cannot fill it. I'm afraid I shall get melancholy: that is the beginning of the end for us, you know."

As Bella spoke the light died out of her eyes, and they grew despairing with the gloom of a tragic memory. Christie drew the beau-

tiful, pathetic face down upon her bosom, longing to comfort, yet feeling very powerless to lighten Bella's burden.

But Christie's little daughter did it for her. Ruth had been standing near, regarding the "pretty lady" with as much wonder and admiration as if she thought her a fairy princess, who might vanish before she got a good look at her. Divining, with a child's quick instinct, that the princess was in trouble, Ruth flew into the porch, caught up her latest and dearest treasure, and presented it as a sure consolation, with such sweet good-will, that Bella could not refuse, although it was only a fuzzy caterpillar in a little box.

"I give it to you because it is my nicest one and just ready to spin up. Do you like pussy pillars? and know how they do it?" asked Ruth, emboldened by the kiss she got in return for her offering.

"Tell me all about it, darling," and Bella could not help smiling as the child fixed her great eyes upon her, and told her little story with such earnestness that she was breathless by the time she ended.

"At first they are only grubs, you know, and stay down in the earth; then they are like this, nice and downy and humpy, when they walk; and when it's time they spin up and go to sleep. It's all dark in their little beds, and they don't know what may happen to 'em; but they are not afraid, 'cause God takes care of 'em. So they wait, and don't fret, and when it's right for 'em they come out splendid butterflies, all beautiful and shining like your gown. They are happy then, and fly away to eat honey, and live in the air, and never be creeping worms any more."

"That's a pretty lesson for me," said Bella softly, "I accept and thank you for it, little teacher; I'll try to be a patient 'pussy-pillar' though it *is* dark, and I don't know what may happen to me; and I'll wait hopefully till it's time to float away a happy butterfly."

"Go and get the friend some flowers, the gayest and sweetest you can find, Pansy," said Christie, and as the child ran off she added to her friend,—

"Now we must think of something pleasant for you to do. It may take a little time, but I know we shall find your niche if we give our minds to it."

"That's one reason why I came. I heard some friends of mine talking about you yesterday, and they seemed to think you were equal to anything in the way of good works. Charity is the usual refuge for people like me, so I wish to try it. I don't mind doing or seeing sad or disagreeable things, if it only fills up my life and helps me to forget."

"You will help more by giving of your abundance to those who know how to dispense it wisely, than by trying to do it yourself, my dear. I never advise pretty creatures like you to tuck up their silk gowns and go down into the sloughs with alms for the poor, who don't like it any better than you do, and so much pity and money are wasted in sentimental charity."

"Then what shall I do?"

"If you choose, you can find plenty of work in your own class; for, if you will allow me to say it, they need help quite as much

as the paupers, though in a very different way."

"Oh, you mean I'm to be strong-minded, to cry aloud and spare not, to denounce their iniquities, and demand their money or their lives."

"Now, Bella, that's personal; for I made my first speech a night or two ago."

"I know you did, and I wish I'd heard it. I'd make mine to-night if I could do it half as well as I'm told you did," interrupted Bella, clapping her hands with a face full of approval.

But Christie was in earnest, and produced her new project with all speed.

"I want you to try a little experiment for me, and if it succeeds, you shall have all the glory; I've been waiting for some one to undertake it, and I fancy you are the woman. Not every one could attempt it; for it needs wealth and position, beauty and accomplishments, much tact, and more than all a heart that has not been spoilt by the world, but taught through sorrow how to value and use life well."

"Christie, what is it? this experiment that

needs so much, and yet which you think me capable of trying?" asked Bella, interested and flattered by this opening.

"I want you to set a new fashion: you know you can set almost any you choose in your own circle; for people are very like sheep, and will follow their leader if it happens to be one they fancy. I don't ask you to be a De Staël, and have a brilliant salon: I only want you to provide employment and pleasure for others like yourself, who now are dying of frivolity or ennui."

"I should love to do that if I could. Tell me how."

"Well, dear, I want you to make Harry's home as beautiful and attractive as you can; to keep all the elegance and refinement of former times, and to add to it a new charm by setting the fashion of common sense. Invite all the old friends, and as many new as you choose; but have it understood that they are to come as intelligent men and women, not as pleasure-hunting beaux and belles; give them conversation instead of gossip; less food for the body and more for the mind;

the healthy stimulus of the nobler pleasures they can command, instead of the harmful excitements of present dissipation. In short, show them the sort of society we need more of, and might so easily have if those who possess the means of culture cared for the best sort, and took pride in acquiring it. Do you understand, Bella?"

"Yes, but it's a great undertaking, and you could do it better than I."

"Bless you, no! I haven't a single qualification for it but the will to have it done. I'm 'strong-minded,' a radical and a reformer. I've done all sorts of dreadful things to get my living, and I have neither youth, beauty, talent, or position to back me up; so I should only be politely ignored if I tried the experiment myself. I don't want you to break out and announce your purpose with a flourish, or try to reform society at large, but I *do* want you to devote yourself and your advantages to quietly insinuating a better state of things into one little circle. The very fact of your own want, your own weariness, proves how much such a reform is needed. There

are so many fine young women longing for something to fill up the empty places that come when the first flush of youth is over, and the serious side of life appears, and so many promising young men learning to conceal or condemn the high ideals and the noble purposes they started with, because they find no welcome for them. You might help both by simply creating a purer atmosphere for them to breathe, sunshine to foster instead of frost to nip their good aspirations, and so, even if you planted no seed, you might encourage a timid sprout or two that would one day be a lovely flower or a grand tree all would admire and enjoy."

As Christie ended with the figure suggested by her favourite work, Bella said, after a thoughtful pause,—

"But few of the women I know can talk about anything but servants, dress, and gossip. Here and there one knows something of music, art, or literature; but the superior ones are not favourites with the larger class of gentlemen."

"Then let the superior women cultivate the

smaller class of men who do admire intelligence as well as beauty. There are plenty of them, and you had better introduce a few as samples, though their coats may not be of the finest broadcloth, nor their fathers 'solid men.' Women lead in society, and when men find that they cannot only dress with taste, but talk with sense, the lords of creation will be glad to drop mere twaddle, and converse as with their equals.

"Bless my heart!" cried Christie, walking about the room as if she had mounted her hobby, and was off for a canter, "how people can go on in such an idiotic fashion passes my understanding. Why keep up an endless clatter about gowns and dinners, your neighbours' affairs, and your own aches, when there is a world full of grand questions to settle, lovely things to see, wise things to study, and noble things to imitate? Bella, you *must* try the experiment, and be the queen of a better society than any you can reign over now."

"It looks inviting, and I *will* try it with you to help me. I know Harry would like

it, and I'll get him to recommend it to his patients. If he is as successful here as elsewhere, they will swallow any dose he orders; for he knows how to manage people wonderfully well. He prescribed a silk dress to a despondent, dowdy patient once, telling her the electricity of silk was good for her nerves: she obeyed, and when well dressed felt so much better, that she bestirred herself generally, and recovered; but to this day she sings the praises of Dr. Carrol's electric cure."

Bella was laughing gaily as she spoke, and so was Christie as she replied,—

"That's just what I want you to do with *your* patients. Dress up their minds in their best; get them out into the air; and cure their ills by the magnetism of more active, earnest lives."

They talked over the new plan with increasing interest; for Christie did not mean that Bella should be one of the brilliant women who shine for a little while, and then go out like a firework. And Bella felt as if she had found something to do in her own

sphere, a sort of charity she was fitted for, and with it a pleasant sense of power to give it zest.

When Letty and her mother came in, they found a much happier-looking guest than the one Christie had welcomed an hour before. Scarcely had she introduced them when voices in the lane made all look up to see old Hepsey and Mrs. Wilkins approaching.

"Two more of my dear friends, Bella; a fugitive slave and a laundress. One has saved scores of her own people, and is my pet heroine; the other has the bravest, cheeriest soul I know, and is my private oracle."

The words were hardly out of Christie's mouth when in they came, Hepsey's black face shining with affection, and Mrs. Wilkins, as usual, running over with kind words.

"My dear creeter, the best of wishes and no end of happy birthdays. There's a triflin' keepsake! tuck it away, and look at it byme-by. Mis Sterlin', I'm proper glad to see you lookin' so well. Aunt Letty, how's that darlin' child? I ain't the pleasure of your

acquaintance, Miss; but I'm pleased to see you: the children all sent love, likewise Lisha, whose bones is better sense I tried the camfire and red flannel."

Then they settled down like a flock of birds of various plumage and power of song, but all amicably disposed, and ready to peck socially at any topic which might turn up.

Mrs. Wilkins started one by exclaiming, as she "laid off" her bonnet,—

"Sakes alive, there's a new picter! Ain't it beautiful?"

"Colonel Fletcher brought it this morning. A great artist painted it for him, and he gave it to me in a way that added much to its value," answered Christie, with both gratitude and affection in her face, for she was a woman who could change a lover to a friend, and keep him all her life.

It was a quaint and lovely picture of Mr. Greatheart leading the fugitives from the City of Destruction. A dark wood lay behind, a wide river rolled before; Mercy and Christiana pressed close to their faithful guide, who went down the rough and narrow path,

bearing a cross-hilted sword in his right hand, and holding a sleeping baby with the left. The sun was just rising, and a long ray made a bright path athwart the river, turned Greatheart's dinted armour to gold, and shone into the brave and tender face that seemed to look beyond the sunrise.

"There's just a hint of Davy in it that is very comforting to me," said Mrs. Sterling, as she laid her old hands softly together, and looked up with her devout eyes full of love.

"Dem women oughter bin black," murmured Hepsey tearfully, for she considered David worthy of a place with old John Brown and Colonel Shaw.

"The child looks like Pansy, we all think," added Letty, as Ruth brought her nosegay for Aunty to tie up prettily.

Christie said nothing, because she felt too much; and Bella was also silent because she knew too little. But Mrs. Wilkins, with her kindly tact, changed the subject before it grew painful, and asked, with sudden interest,—

"When be you a-goin' to hold forth agin,

Christie? jest let me know beforehand, and I'll wear my old gloves: I tore my best ones all to rags clappin' of you; it was so extra good."

"I don't deserve any credit for the speech, because it spoke itself, and I couldn't help it. I had no thought of such a thing till it came over me all at once, and I was up before I knew it. I'm truly glad you liked it, but I shall never make another, unless you think I'd better. You know I always ask your advice, and, what is more remarkable, usually take it," said Christie, glad to consult her oracle.

"Hadn't you better rest a little before you begin any new task, my daughter? You have done so much these last years you must be tired," interrupted Mrs. Sterling, with a look of tender anxiety.

"You know I work for two, mother," answered Christie, with the clear, sweet expression her face always wore when she spoke of David. "I am not tired yet: I hope I never shall be, for without my work I should fall into despair or ennui. There is

so much to be done, and it is so delighful to help do it, that I never mean to fold my hands till they are useless. I owe all I can do, for in labour, and the efforts and experiences that grew out of it, I have found independence, education, happiness, and religion."

"Then, my dear, you are ready to help other folks into the same blessed state, and it's your duty to do it," cried Mrs. Wilkins, her keen eyes full of sympathy and commendation as they rested on Christie's cheerful, earnest face. "Ef the sperrit moves you to speak, up and do it without no misgivin's. *I* think it was a special leadin' that night, and I hope you'll foller, for it ain't every one that can make folks laugh and cry with a few plain words that go right to a body's heart and stop there real comfortable and fillin'. I guess this is your next job, my dear, and you'd better ketch hold and give it the right turn, for it's goin' to take time, and women ain't stood alone for so long they'll need a sight of boostin'."

There was a general laugh at the close of

Mrs. Wilkins's remarks; but Christie answered seriously, "I accept the task, and will do my share faithfully with words or work, as shall seem best. We all need much preparation for the good time that is coming to us, and can get it best by trying to know and help, love and educate one another, as we do here."

With an impulsive gesture Christie stretched her hands to the friends about her, and with one accord they laid theirs on hers, a loving league of sisters, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, each ready to do her part to hasten the coming of the happy end.

"Me too!" cried little Ruth, and spread her chubby hand above the rest: a hopeful omen, seeming to promise that the coming generation of women will not only receive but deserve their liberty, by learning that the greatest of God's gifts to us is the privilege of sharing His great work.

THE END.

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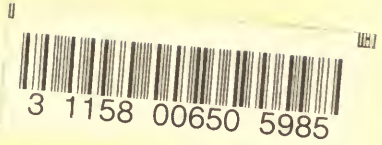
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